

ANOTHER VELVET REVOLUTION?  
IMPLICATIONS OF THE 1989 CZECH VELVET REVOLUTION ON IRAN

BY  
CHRISTOPHER M. VALERIANO

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

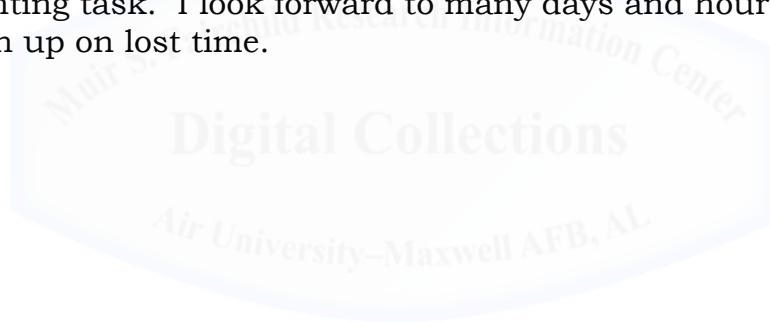
Major Christopher M. Valeriano (BA, University of Connecticut; MMOAS, Air Command and Staff College; MPHIL, School of Advanced Air and Space Studies) is a US Army Field Artillery officer stationed at Fort Bragg, NC. He was commissioned through the US Army Reserve Officer Training Course (ROTC) in 1995. His assignments include various artillery command and staff duty positions in 2d Infantry Division, Republic of Korea; 3d Infantry Division, Fort Benning, Georgia; 82d Airborne Division and XVIIIth Airborne Corps at Fort Bragg, NC.



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## ABSTRACT

In a recent *Washington Times* article, retired Air Force officer, Lt. Gen. Thomas McInerney, provided commentary on potential US military courses of action to counter Iranian nuclear advances. The editorial published on 3 August 2010, quoted the General as stating...“It will be primarily an air attack with covert work to start a ‘velvet’ revolution so [the] Iranian people can take back their country.” This thesis paper is presented in response to that statement and to examine the validity of the premise. It is intended to provide critical analysis of the two part hypothesis inferred by Lt. Gen. McInerney in his statement. He assumes that the preponderance of Iranian people want change and are willing to “take back their country” to make it happen. He also implies that US influence through air attacks and covert operations could set the conditions for a “velvet” revolution to take place. Accordingly, the thesis investigation will examine the state of affairs (political, social, cultural, economic, etc) in present day Iran to determine if a “velvet” revolution is indeed conceivable and what conditions must exist to promote it. In order to accomplish this task, the thesis will begin by defining the term “velvet” revolution in relation to the Czechoslovakia Velvet Revolution of 1989. A brief historical summary of the strategic culture and social/political situation leading up to the 1989 Velvet Revolution will be examined. Using the strategic framework of Edward Luttwak outlined in his book *Coup d’Etat*, the investigation will compare and contrast the strategic conditions that existed in Czechoslovakia during a doomed revolution, the 1968 “Prague Spring,” and the 1989 Velvet Revolution. The intent is to identify internal conditions which enabled the non-violent Velvet Revolution to successfully occur in Czech. They will then be employed to determine if similar conditions exist or can be replicated in Iran. In doing so, McInerney’s hypothesis can be tested. That is, does evidence suggest that the democratically minded citizens of Iran can carry out a similar revolution as the successful one in Czech in 1989?

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## Introduction

*...it will be primarily an air attack with covert work to start a 'velvet' revolution so [the] Iranian people can take back their country.*

— Lt. Gen. Thomas McInerney (USAF, ret'd)

## 2009 Iranian “Twitter Revolution”

On 13 June 2009, the results of the previous day's presidential election in the Islamic Republic of Iran were announced to the world. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was declared the winner. His election was allegedly based on an overwhelming majority of the popular vote. Immediately after the news Iranians took to the streets. Millions of citizens involved in the protest movement conducted rallies and marches in Tehran and other cities throughout the country. The movement, which lasted for weeks, was referred to as the “Twitter Revolution” for its reliance on social media to mobilize the people.<sup>1</sup> The tremendous participation of the populace in the protests captured the attention of the international community. Was this the beginning of a democratic revolution within the Islamic republic? This was not to be the case.

As protests continued, government paramilitary militia known as the Basij, as well as Iranian police forces, attempted to put down the demonstrations. The campaign started with intimidation but grew more violent and led to the confirmed deaths of over twenty people and the arrests of more than 3,000 individuals.<sup>2</sup> Unconfirmed reports by dissident leaders placed the death toll in excess of two hundred, while

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<sup>1</sup> Editorial, “Iran's Twitter Revolution,” *The Washington Times*, 16 June 2009, <http://washingtontimes.com/news/2009/jun/16/irans-twitter-revolution/>.

<sup>2</sup> Amir Taheri, “The fight for Iran's future is far from over,” *The Times*, 30 June 2009, [http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/guest\\_contributors/article6605062.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/guest_contributors/article6605062.ece).

hundreds more were reported as injured.<sup>3</sup> Government opposition leaders and prominent politicians known for advocating reform were also detained by police. Other measures taken by Iranian authorities attempted to cut off the means of coordinating the protests. For example, "The authorities closed universities in Tehran, blocked cell phone transmissions and access to Facebook and some other Web sites, and...shut down text-messaging services."<sup>4</sup>

In an effort to appease the masses, the Iranian Guardian Council claimed they conducted a ballot recount on 16 June 2009 which only re-confirmed Ahmadinejad's victory. As the violent police actions persisted in response to demonstrations throughout the week, the size of the crowds protesting subsided gradually. Sporadic demonstrations continued for months following the disputed elections, but the main protest movement came to an end by 19 June with a public address by the Iranian Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Khamenei announced that the elections were legitimate and Ahmadinejad had won fairly. Along with proclaiming his support for the re-elected president, the Supreme Leader called for demonstrations to cease and warned that future protests would suffer dire consequences.<sup>5</sup>

### **1999 Student Reform Movement**

The protests in response to the 2009 Iranian presidential election were the largest opposition demonstrations the autocratic regime had witnessed in ten years. Not since 1999 had the public displayed the collective courage to challenge the government to that degree. In early July of that year, the Islamic government enacted new restrictive media

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<sup>3</sup> Eli Lake, "Iran protestors alter tactics to avoid death," *The Washington Times*, 25 June 2009, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/jun/25/opposition-alters-tactics-to-avoid-protest-deaths/>.

<sup>4</sup> Robert F. Worth, "Protests Flare in Tehran as Opposition Disputes Vote," *The New York Times*, 13 June 2009, [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/14/world/middleeast/14iran.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/14/world/middleeast/14iran.html?_r=1).

<sup>5</sup> Print Edition, "Iran's second revolution?," *The Economist*, 15 June 1999, <http://www.economist.com/node/222902>.

laws and government censures on the press. A special clerical court also closed a newspaper establishment, *Salam*, which had become a symbol of the reform movement in Iran.

On 8 July 1999, university students in Tehran conducted a peaceful protest in response to the government decisions. This protest challenging the government decision provoked a retaliatory response that same evening. The regime attacked pro-democracy Tehran students in their university dormitories using police forces and members from the Ansar-e Hizbullah, an Islamist vigilante group. As a result, “several students were killed and several dozen injured (officials admit to one death only, but the students claimed that at least five died).”<sup>6</sup>

In reaction to the attacks, thousands of students immediately rallied in protest in Tehran. The demonstrations quickly spread to other major cities that host universities throughout the country. The students called on the reform-minded Iranian President at the time, Mohammad Khatami, to live up to his campaign promises. They demanded “protection from out-of-control security men, a free press, and a fully democratic electoral system.”<sup>7</sup>

President Khatami and the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, both condemned the attacks on the dormitories and called for the students to cease demonstrations. However, the students were not satisfied with the government’s response and instead took action which escalated the violence. On 13 July, the students decided to attack the agency responsible for the supervision of the police, as well as other security forces in Iran. An effort to storm the Ministry of Interior led to “running street battles as the police and the Basij, or Islamist militia,

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<sup>6</sup> Print Edition, “Protesting in Tehran,” *The Economist*, 15 June 1999, <http://www.economist.com/node/223139>.

<sup>7</sup> Print Edition, “Protesting in Tehran.”

took on the students, many of whom were arrested.”<sup>8</sup> After six days of violent protests and rioting at least three more people were killed and over 200 were injured.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the student reform movement culminated and the oppressive government remained in power.

### **Application and Relevance**

The Islamic Republic of Iran continues to govern through fear and repressive measures. What’s more, the regime remains dedicated to what the West perceives as the pursuit of nuclear weapons, radical extremist ideology, and irresponsible regional conduct. Through extremely hostile rhetoric and antagonistic initiatives, Iran has proven itself as one of the greatest threats to US strategic interests in the Middle East. Even with United Nations sanctions and other forms of diplomatic pressure imposed by the international community on Tehran, it is unlikely that the government will modify its behavior any time soon. Accordingly, many international relations theorists and policy makers in Washington D.C. are at odds as to how best to change Iranian government policy or behavior.

In a *Washington Times* article published on August 3, 2010, Lt. Gen. Thomas McInerney (USAF, ret’d) was asked for his opinion on how to deal with the problematic Iranian government. He suggested the need for future US military action in Iran. In the article he offered the following prescription for military success in Iran: “...it will be primarily an air attack with covert work to start a ‘velvet’ revolution so [the] Iranian people can take back their country.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Print Edition, “Protesting in Tehran.”

<sup>9</sup> James Robbins, “Six days that shook Iran,” *BBC News*, 11 July 1999, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/828696.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/828696.stm).

<sup>10</sup> Rowan Scarborough, “Bombers, missiles could end Iran nukes: Pentagon has plan for attack,” *The Washington Times*, 2 August 2010, <http://washingtontimes.com/news/2010/aug/2/bombers-missiles-could-end-iran-nukes/?page=1>.

## **Hypothesis**

This thesis seeks to examine the hypothesis implicit within Lt. Gen. McNerney's statement, that airpower and covert action combined can facilitate a Velvet Revolution in Iran. Lt. Gen. McNerney's statement assumes that the Velvet Revolution, which occurred in Czechoslovakia in 1989, was an unqualified success and a model for future Iranian revolutions to emulate. Therefore the first task of this thesis is to identify the internal and external conditions that enabled the non-violent Velvet Revolution to occur successfully and compare it to the conditions in contemporary Iran. To complete this task this thesis answers the following four questions.

- What enabled the success of the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia in 1989?
- Why did the 1999 and 2009 Iranian revolutions fail?
- Do the conditions for a peaceful revolution exist in Iran? and,
- Can US policy and initiatives enable or assist the movement?

## **Methodology**

In order to answer these four questions, a case study of Czechoslovakia during communist rule will be conducted. Specifically, this thesis explores a successful and a failed revolution in Czechoslovakia: the Velvet Revolution in 1989 and the doomed 1968 "Prague Spring" revolution. This exploration will examine the political, social, cultural, and economic conditions that facilitated reform and the overthrow of the autocratic communist regime during the Velvet Revolution. These conditions will be compared to those in Czechoslovakia in 1968 which determined the outcome of the failed "Prague Spring."

To facilitate this investigation, the two Czech revolutions will be examined through the basic framework offered by American military strategist and historian, Edward Luttwak, in his book *Coup d'Etat*. The

concepts proposed by Luttwak in his book are presented as a prescriptive manual to seize political control of a state. Although Luttwak specifically investigates the coup as the method used to displace government leadership, many of his propositions are also valid for a non-violent revolution. This is possible because unlike classical meanings of the word, which focus on assuming control through the forceful means of military or political leaders, Luttwak takes a different approach to the concept.

According to Luttwak's definition, a coup can involve elements from all the methods to overcome a state, such as: a revolution, civil war, putsch, liberation, insurgency, etc. Yet, "unlike most of them, the coup is not necessarily assisted by either the intervention of the masses, or, to any significant degree, by military-type force."<sup>11</sup> Therefore according to Luttwak, "a coup consists of the infiltration of a small but critical segment of the state apparatus, which is then used to displace the government from its control of the remainder."<sup>12</sup> Also, like a non-violent revolution, in a coup "it is essential to avoid bloodshed, because this may well have crucial negative repercussions amongst the personnel of the armed forces and police."<sup>13</sup>

This investigation will examine the failures and successes of the Czech and Iranian revolutions in accordance with Luttwak's regime change framework. Specifically the framework concentrates on four areas of interest: the current government; the military, police and security apparatus; the media; and the populace. These areas, and Luttwak's propositions and preconditions for each, will serve as the lens to examine and compare the conditions which existed in each revolution.

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<sup>11</sup> Edward Luttwak, *Coup d'Etat: A Practical Handbook*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 26.

<sup>12</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 27.

<sup>13</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 144.



This thesis explores the initiatives taken by the Czechoslovak populace and the authoritarian communist government in both 1968 and 1989. These efforts are compared and contrasted with the conditions in Iran in 1999, 2009, and today. This work will also examine the dissident/student movements and other “political forces” at play in Czechoslovakia and search for evidence of similar efforts in 1999, 2009, and present-day Iran. The examination will be utilized to validate the hypothesis that the successful outcome of the Velvet Revolution can be replicated in Iran. Therefore, the conditions of the government, security apparatus, media, and populace (Luttwak’s framework) in Czechoslovakia at the time will serve as the baseline for comparative study.

### **Overview**

Chapter two provides the historical background of Czechoslovakia leading up to the “Prague Spring” in 1968. It begins with the end of World War I and continues through World War II with the fall of the existing Nazi Fascist government in 1945. This chapter also examines the period of national Czechoslovakian re-emergence as a nation known as the Third Republic and the 1948 Communist party take-over. With the succession of Stalin by Nikita Khrushchev as the First Secretary of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union in 1953, a period of decentralization and de-Stalinization in Eastern Europe occurred. Chapter three will look at the failed reform movement of 1968 in Czechoslovakia known as the “Prague Spring” and the corresponding Soviet invasion that ended the revolution.

Chapter four concentrates solely on the six week period in 1989 known as the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia. Examination of the events that transpired during those six weeks is conducted by utilizing declassified telegrams and memorandums from the US Embassy in Prague and US State Department for its primary sources. The study will focus on the first ten days of the period due to their significance. These

days, and the events which occurred within them, served as the catalyst which transformed Czechoslovakian government and society. The chapter places those days and their events in the context of the revolution through a daily chronological historical narrative. Particular attention is paid in chapter four to the social, cultural, political, and ideological situation at the time.

Chapter five is an analysis of the success of the Velvet Revolution and the failure of the Prague Spring reform movement in accordance with Luttwak's framework. This analysis addresses the external and internal forces that prevented or facilitated the outcomes of the two events. The influence and pressure of the Soviet Union on the Government of Czechoslovakia (GOC) is also a factor that is considered in chapter five. The differentiation of external Soviet and international involvement in each of those time periods helps explain the variation in the character of the government and society.

Chapter six examines the 1999 and 2009 failed popular revolutions in Iran and compares them to the successful Velvet Revolution. As in preceding chapters, the focus of this chapter is on the state of affairs and conditions that led to the failures of the attempted Iranian revolutions. In particular this chapter examines the role that religion plays determining revolutionary success. On one level, religion is no different than other political ideologies such as Communism. For this reason, the impact of Islam on the actions of the government and society is examined in very much the same way Communism affected Czechoslovakia.

Lastly, in the conclusion, the current state of affairs in Iran will be analyzed briefly. That information, combined with the lessons of the Velvet Revolution and the two attempted Iranian revolutions, provides the necessary data to determine if a peaceful revolution in Iran is truly possible.

## Chapter 1: Czech History after World War I

*A part must never be improved at the expense of the whole.*

—J.M. Cameron

In the midst of World War I, the two states of Czech, consisting of Bohemia and Moravia-Silesia, and the state of Slovakia, began efforts to unite as one nation. After centuries of rule by the Hapsburg/Austrian dynasty and kingdom of Hungary, the states formed the Czechoslovak National Council in 1916. This endeavor united their efforts to gain independence from the dual monarchy and sway Allied recognition and support. For two years their statesman lobbied the governments of the US, France, and Britain. Finally in October 1918, with the end of the war in sight, the imminent collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the staunch support of US President Woodrow Wilson, Czechoslovakia was formed as a new republic.

### Post World War I

Violence continued for the two years following World War I as the newly formed Czechoslovakia clashed with Hungary, Germany, Austria, and Poland over the border regions of the Czech lands. The international recognition of the borders was resolved by the signing of the accords of the Paris peace conference in 1919 and 1920. Further border disputes with Poland, which had threatened to grow into a protracted military conflict, were essentially solved by a decision of the superpowers in 1924.<sup>1</sup>

Apart from the short period of land disputes with other nations, Czechoslovakia witnessed a phase of peace, stability, and economic growth. The era from 1918-1938 is known as the years of “The First

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<sup>1</sup> Jaroslav Panek and Oldrich Tuma, *A History of the Czech Lands*, (Prague, CZ: Karolinum Press, 2009), 399.

Republic.” Czechoslovakia elected its first President (Thomas G. Masaryk), established a new constitution, and began the task of addressing the disparity between the Czech and Slovak economies, religions, languages, and culture. During this time the republic also experienced a surge of economic prosperity that “ranked eighth in the world in GDP per capita...industrial and agriculture sectors were solid, and the country came to be famous especially for its engineering, automotive works, and military output.”<sup>2</sup> Much of the Republic’s wealth and industrial success was brought on by an influx of German investment capital and factory ownership.

### **Nazi Occupation and World War II**

The years of peace and prosperity were short-lived. By the mid-1930s, Hitler’s expansionary efforts in Europe started to build up momentum. Over 22% of the population living inside Czechoslovakia was ethnically German. They primarily resided within the border region known as the Sudetenland, which was the most industrialized area of the republic. In an effort to gain control of this region and eventually the whole republic, Hitler exploited the qualms of the ethnic German presence. “Not long after that, on September 12, 1938 at the congress of the Nazi party in Nuremburg, Adolf Hitler once again bluntly accused Czechoslovakia of suppressing national rights and promised to ensure the liberation of the Sudeten Germans and annexation of the Czechoslovak border regions to the greater German Reich.”<sup>3</sup>

This action, along with German and Czechoslovak mobilization of military forces convinced Britain and France to get involved. Under the direction of British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, the leaders of the two countries met with Hitler and Benito Mussolini in Munich in September 1938. Both Britain and France wished to avoid war with Germany at all costs and therefore in an effort to appease Hitler, agreed

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<sup>2</sup> Tim Nollen, *Culture Shock! Czech Republic*, (Portland, OR: Graphic Arts Center Publishing, 2005), 21.

<sup>3</sup> Panek and Tuma, *History of the Czech Lands*, 427.

to his demands. On 30 September 1938, the leaders of the four nations signed the Munich Accords. The President of Czechoslovakia Edvard Benes was advised by British and French leaders to either cede the Sudetenland to Germany or face them alone. Without western support President Benes felt that the republic was helpless against the Nazis and reluctantly complied with the agreement.

Once Hitler had control of the Sudetenland he essentially controlled the republic's whole economy. As described by American journalist and historian William L. Shirer,

the final settlement of November 20, 1938 forced Czechoslovakia to cede to Germany 11,000 square miles of territory in which dwelt 2,800,000 Sudeten Germans and 800,000 Czechs. Within this area lay all the vast Czech fortifications which hitherto had formed the most formidable defensive line in Europe, with the possible exception of the Maginot Line in France. But that was not all. Czechoslovakia's entire system of rail, road, telephone, and telegraph communications was disrupted...the dismembered country lost 66 percent of its coal, 80 percent of its lignite, 86 percent of its chemicals, 80 percent of its cement, 80 percent of its textiles, 70 percent of its iron and steel, 70 percent of its electric power, and 40 percent of its timber. A prosperous industrial nation was bankrupted overnight.<sup>4</sup>

With the Nazi military forces well within the fortified border defenses, they were able to advance freely beyond the ceded region. "On 15 March 1939, Hitler declared all of the Czech lands German territory in the cynically-named Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, while enthusiastic Slovaks established their own fascist state."<sup>5</sup> After only 19 years of existence, the First Republic of Czechoslovakia had come to an end.

By the fall of 1939, anti-German sentiment and defiance toward Nazi occupation of the Czech lands grew within the population of the Protectorate. Thousands of citizens participated in resistance

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<sup>4</sup>William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1960), 421-422.

<sup>5</sup> Nollen, *Culture Shock*, 21.

demonstrations and a boycott of public transportation. The Nazi occupiers responded accordingly with repressive measures. During one anti-German protest on 28 October 1939, a university medical student named Jan Opletal was fatally wounded. His funeral was marked by further demonstrations.

Nazi leaders responded to the demonstrations by closing Czech universities and the abduction of more than a thousand university students to concentration camps. Moreover, they executed nine Student Association members without trial. Evidence suggests that, “this harsh approach was not a haphazard reprisal, but part of a thought-out campaign of annihilation of Czech intelligentsia, schools, and culture.”<sup>6</sup>

Aside from student demonstrations and boycotts, an organized resistance to the Fascist government was also building. While living in London at the time, former President Benes initiated a Czechoslovak government-in-exile. With the assistance of his close associates and friends, he created the Political Central (PU). A hierarchically organized underground army known as the military Defense of the Nation organization (ON) was also created. It was built along the same organizational structure of the Czechoslovak army and would be utilized upon Germany’s defeat to restore the pre-Munich borders of the republic and ensure its continuance.<sup>7</sup>

Dissident networks and organizations operated illegally throughout the Protectorate. One such network, the Petition Committee We Will Remain Faithful (PVVZ), formulated its own political program for the republic’s restoration. It was assisted by publishers of illegal magazines and journals designed to create and recruit resistance.<sup>8</sup>

Aside from the PU, ON, and PVVZ, the Communists also participated in the resistance movement. Their ambitions to gain power

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<sup>6</sup> Panek and Tuma, *History of the Czech Lands*, 444.

<sup>7</sup> Panek and Tuma, *History of the Czech Lands*, 445.

<sup>8</sup> Panek and Tuma, *History of the Czech Lands*, 445.

in the Czech lands through a Bolshevik revolution still existed, but they knew it was not possible in the present state. In the first few months they assisted with the struggle to remove the Nazi occupiers and relied on the restoration of the republic in order to eventually achieve their goal. However, the situation changed in September 1939 when the Soviet Union and Germany signed the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact. As dictated by Moscow, the Communists ceased all resistance support and took a more neutral stance. The change in their position had serious consequences on the Nazi resistance; it lost much of the unity it once benefited from. Nevertheless, the Communists rejoined the resistance less than two years later as war broke out between Germany and the Soviet Union.

From the earliest days of the occupation, the Czech resistance clashed with the security apparatus of the Nazi occupiers. By 1941, the resistance achieved remarkable results. The opposition network continued to function while illegal press continued to be published. Successful intelligence-gathering activities developed and wide ranging political programs for the post-war renewal of Czechoslovakia were prepared. Opposition abroad also played a significant role as Czech emigrants joined foreign resistance organizations. Gradually three main centers of exile were formed in the US, Britain, and France.<sup>9</sup>

By the second half of 1943, the defeat of Germany and the Axis powers was all but imminent. This motivated Czechoslovak political leaders to start conducting international negotiations towards a new independent Czechoslovak Republic with its pre-Munich 1938 borders restored. With this in mind, Edvard Benes travelled to Moscow in December 1943 to gain the support of the Soviet government. His efforts resulted in the signing of the 20-year Czechoslovak-Soviet Pact of Friendship, Mutual Aid and Post-war Co-operation.

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<sup>9</sup> Panek and Tuma, *History of the Czech Lands*, 446.



## **Post World War II and Communist Rule**

By April 1945, the government of Czechoslovakia was reestablished back in Prague under the leadership of President Benes. As a result of the new relationship established with the Soviet Union, the CPCZ grew in size and power. The Soviets were held in high favor by most of the Czechoslovak society since they were viewed as liberators from Nazi rule. This worked to the advantage of the Communists, and the CPCZ capitalized on their new found popularity.

In the general elections of April 1946, "the CPCZ's sweeping victory...confirmed its standing as the strongest political party in the Czechoslovak Republic."<sup>10</sup> Several party-members were voted into the most critical government positions such as the Prime Minister, and Ministers of Interior, Information, and Education. Fearing that the Communist party was moving to control the government, twelve non-Communist ministers resigned in an attempt to force a showdown with the CPCZ. However, their efforts failed, and the Communists remained in control.

By mid February 1948, the conditions were set for the Coup d'etat that would put an end to democracy in the republic.

The Communists set up The Central Action Committee of the National Front that began coordinating the activities of local National Front Action Committees, which in turn had begun springing up all across the country...Nobody appointed their members or authorized their establishment, yet they acted on behalf of self-appointed 'progressive' forces, and succeeded in preventing lawful, properly elected authorities and their official representatives from doing their job...In the course of time, the NF Action Committees became the key instrument of the Communist coup, and they gradually assumed real power. The success of the coup was further aided by the

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<sup>10</sup> Panek and Tuma, *History of the Czech Lands*, 483.



armed forces...[and] police units [contributed] in Prague and participated in an open coup d'état in Bratislava.<sup>11</sup>

Democratic and Socialist party members made every effort to oppose the Communist take-over, but the CPCZ had grown too strong and controlled all military and police forces. The Communists even used “guerilla fighters” to seize the headquarters of the opposition parties.<sup>12</sup>

Throughout February 1948, President Benes held out to CPCZ demands. Meanwhile, university students demonstrated in Prague in an attempt to uphold democracy. In the end though, President Benes was unable to resist the Communists. In an effort to prevent violence and civil war, he ceded to their demands to replace all non-communist government officials within the parliament. In June 1948, with the government completely dominated by the CPCZ, President Edvard Benes resigned and he was replaced by Prime Minister Klement Gottwald.

Once the Communist Party attained control of the government, they set about instituting Socialism into Czech politics, economics, and society. “Most private property, from land to private enterprise, was nationalized and individual freedoms of travel and expression were cut off.”<sup>13</sup> Czechoslovakia was successfully revamped into a model Eastern European Soviet satellite state. Major industries, transportation and commerce activities were also nationalized. Churches were restricted, education systems were reorganized along Marxist lines and the collectivization of agriculture occurred. Prominent opponents to the CPCZ were killed, imprisoned, or forced into exile.

In the early 1950s, in a response to Stalin’s fears of “traitors” within the Communist party, the CPCZ conducted several public trials

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<sup>11</sup> Panek and Tuma, *History of the Czech Lands*, 497.

<sup>12</sup> Panek and Tuma, *History of the Czech Lands*, 498.

<sup>13</sup> Nollen, *Culture Shock*, 23.

for show in which it purged many of its own members. The most notorious of these trials occurred in November 1952 where fourteen esteemed Communist party officials were tried and found guilty. These officials included the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Deputy Minister of National Defense, and most importantly, the CPCZ's former Secretary General, Rudolf Slansky. All but three of these individuals were sentenced to death and executed, while the others were sentenced to life in prison.

With the death of Soviet leader Joseph Stalin in 1953, President Antonin Zapotocky passed a number of measures that permitted a mild liberalization of social conditions within Czechoslovakia. These measures were in compliance with the new policies and demands for De-Stalinization implemented by new Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev. They were also an attempt to address political and economic crises caused by Communist policies and appease the nation's factory workers, farmers, students, and intellectuals. However, this period was short lived as the Communist Party's First Secretary, Antonin Novotny, took over the presidency in 1957 and restored the strict Stalinist system of government.<sup>14</sup>

### **Path to Reform**

In 1963, severe economic conditions throughout Czechoslovakia finally forced Novotný and the Communists to re-address the hard-line political system. They passed minor policy changes in an effort to begin gradual De-Stalinization. The changes provided slightly more social freedoms to the people, but did not fix the economic issues. What's more, Czechoslovak society, witnessing hints of liberalization, began to demand further political reform. "By the summer of 1967, pressure for consistent reform was mounting from within the [communist] party (in

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<sup>14</sup>Panek and Tuma, *History of the Czech Lands*, 514-16.

particular from Slovak communists) and social organizations (the youth union and cultural unions). Central Committee functionaries close to Novotny began to warn that the situation was tense and under certain circumstances could be misused for counter-revolution.”<sup>15</sup> Instead of reconciliation, Novotny blamed the dissent on anti-socialist ideals and decided to fall back on hard-line tactics to quell the opposition. Security forces of the communist party were deployed to detain and discipline the writers and media focused on anti-government themes. “...Novotny considered the writers an organized opposition bent on restoring bourgeois democracy.”<sup>16</sup>

On the evening of 31 October, several hundred university students took to the streets in spontaneous protest against living conditions in the Strahov dormitory. As the event evolved, their chants acquired an increasingly anti-government nature. Police responded after the demonstration marched too close to Prague Castle while the Central Committee was in session. In an attempt to disperse the protestors, police resorted to brutal tactics that badly injured a number of students. The students then retreated back to the university where they resumed their protest outside their hostels, prompting another police assault.<sup>17</sup>

Outraged by the police brutality that occurred during the protests, student leaders and parents demanded that an investigation into the incident be conducted. On 20 November, one thousand students turned out to threaten further protests if the investigation was not satisfactorily carried out. With the increased student threats and negative public attention brought on by the demonstrations, Novotny acted to quell the

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<sup>15</sup> Kieran Williams, *The Prague Spring and its Aftermath: Czechoslovak Politics 1968-1970*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 54.

<sup>16</sup> Williams, *Prague Spring*, 55.

<sup>17</sup> Williams, *Prague Spring*, 56.

student resistance by disbanding student organizations. Prominent student leaders were expelled and drafted into the Army.

In an effort to protect his position, Novotny focused on efforts to bring about normalization. However his reputation and legitimacy had completely deteriorated due to his inability to carry-out the rehabilitation process advocated by Khrushchev. By January 1968, political officers in the communist party "...agreed that the situation was critical, but concluded that it would be better resolved by very different methods."<sup>18</sup> They decided that radical changes were necessary and went about the process to change the leadership at the top. Alexander Dubcek, a Slovak, was chosen to replace Novotny as first secretary of the communist party. By March, Novotny was also forced to resign the Presidency, as General Ludvik Svoboda, a World War II hero, was chosen to be his replacement. Under the leadership and influence of each of these men, 1968 in Czechoslovakia would witness the first period of open criticism of the current Communist system and genuine efforts toward reform. This period came to be known as the "Prague Spring."

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<sup>18</sup> Williams, *Prague Spring*, 57

## Chapter 2: 1968 “Prague Spring”

*How many a dispute could have been deflated into a single paragraph if the disputants had just dared to define their terms.*

—Aristotle

### Political and Social Change

In April 1968, the Central Committee of the CPCZ convened to finalize additional government and party personnel changes and debate policy initiatives. Spurred by Alexander Dubcek’s desires for a socialist democracy,<sup>1</sup> the new regime set about rehabilitation by pursuing liberal and democratic initiatives that kicked off a four month period known as “Prague Spring.” The most significant outcome of the meetings was the implementation of the Party Action Plan.

It promised to ensure legal security, civil liberties, liberalization in culture, media, and science, and to reconcile relations between Czechs, Slovaks, and other nationalities. It also sanctioned the implementation of an economic reform based on combining the advantages of state ownership and market forces. The role of central planning in the economy was intended to be significantly restricted; businesses were to receive much more independence; and the principle of profit maximization was to regain respect. Private initiative and entrepreneurship in services and commercial trade were to be given increasingly more room.<sup>2</sup>

When the Action Plan was adopted, it appeared that a successful rehabilitation in Czechoslovakia was finally under way. The plan essentially guaranteed freedom of speech, travel, press, assembly, and

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Ello, *Czechoslovakia’s Blueprint for “Freedom”*, (Washington DC: Acropolis Books, 1968), 9.

<sup>2</sup> Jaroslav Panek and Oldrich Tuma, *A History of the Czech Lands*, (Prague, CZ: Karolinum Press, 2009), 545.

religion. It also promised federal status to Slovakia and an increased role in government for non-communists. In all, the Action Plan was viewed very favorably by Czechoslovak society, as well as the governments of Romania, Yugoslavia, and many Western European Communist parties.

Contrary to the view of aforementioned nations, the Action Plan was a matter of grave concern for the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia's neighbors, East Germany and Poland. They feared that these drastic changes might cause similar reform movements within their own countries. Their concerns were justifiable in that they relied "on past experience to guide their behavior, notably the grave threat to Soviet security that had arisen from the Second World War and the danger to bloc cohesion that had been posed by the Yugoslav withdrawal in 1948, the Polish events in 1956, and the Hungarian uprising the same year."<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the political and social reform initiatives in Czechoslovakia coincided with a period of renewed hostility with China. Thus the Brezhnev leadership was forced to "evolve a firm strategy toward the containment and isolation of the enormous ideological threat being posed by China's Cultural Revolution."<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, reduced censorship restored the media and journalism in Czechoslovakia, and provided editorial opportunities to voice political opposition and anti-regime viewpoints. The Writer's Union was reinstated and the first issue of their weekly journal was published with an essay by Vaclav Havel on the potential and benefits of political pluralism.<sup>5</sup> Unbeknownst to any one at the time including himself, Havel would lead the 1989 Velvet Revolution and become president of a free Czechoslovakia (which will be addressed further in the following chapter).

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<sup>33</sup> Karen Dawisha, *The Kremlin and the Prague Spring*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), x.

<sup>4</sup> Dawisha, *The Kremlin*, 343.

<sup>5</sup> Panek and Tuma, *History of the Czech Lands*, 546.

Along with political opposition themes, the rhetoric coming out of much of the journalistic media at the time was anti-Soviet. This evoked further hostility amongst the heads of the Soviet, Polish, and East German states. Yet, unlike their Polish and East German counterparts, the majority of Soviet Politburo members preferred to handle the situation diplomatically instead of resorting immediately to a military solution.<sup>6</sup> On numerous occasions Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev voiced concerns and provided official warnings to Dubcek about "...the continued expression of anti-Soviet sentiment in the face of official pleas for moderation."<sup>7</sup> Soviet concerns were less about the reforms taking place, and more toward the CPCZ's ability to control the situation and prevent a counter-revolution from occurring. With the members of the CPCZ "divided between Czechs and Slovaks on the one hand, and pro- and anti- Novotny elements on the other, the Party appeared to be experiencing considerable internal dissension."<sup>8</sup>

Warsaw Pact meetings held in July and August put additional Communist bloc pressures and official warnings on Dubcek and the CPCZ. During one meeting between Brezhnev and Dubcek on 31 July, the two leaders discussed scheduling the next Warsaw Pact session in Bratislava. The conversation turned toward the Soviet ruler's concerns about the Czech democratization process and the perception of capitalist or counter-revolutionary intentions. Both parties left the meeting under the auspice that certain measures would be addressed by Dubcek. According to Brezhnev, "Dubcek agreed with the necessity to stop the 'counter-revolution' in Czechoslovakia, to restore control over the media and to remove from the Presidium members who were considered by the

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<sup>6</sup> Jiri Valenta, *Soviet Intervention in Czechoslovakia, 1968: Anatomy of a Decision*, (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1991), 166-7.

<sup>7</sup> Ello, *Blueprint*, 16.

<sup>8</sup> Ello, *Blueprint*, 16.



Soviets to be *personae non gratae*...”<sup>9</sup> However, in his memoirs years later, Dubcek admitted the promises he made were purposely ambiguous in an effort to outwit and appease Brezhnev.<sup>10</sup>

As the reform movement continued, the Soviets published sharp attacks on the Czechoslovak leadership and tried to intimidate the government by conducting military exercises in neighboring states.<sup>11</sup> In response, Dubcek and the reformers within the CPCZ passed a resolution on 1 June focused on slowing the pace of reform. The intent was to demonstrate societal control to the Warsaw Pact members. Czech leaders continued to pledge their allegiance to the Communist Party and its leading role in government. They affirmed they would remain a vital member of the Warsaw Pact alliance while continuing gradual reform.

As the reformist leaders in the government were trying to slow down the process they started, the populace mobilized to speed it up. Czech citizens were enjoying their new found freedoms and desired more. They became concerned when they witnessed Dubcek and the CPCZ succumbing to Soviet pressures and the build-up of foreign military along the borders. In response to the resolution, on 27 June 1968, Czech writer Ludvik Vaculik published his manifesto entitled “Two Thousand Words.” It was signed by dozens of intellectuals and public figures, to include a few CPCZ members, and was an appeal to citizens to accelerate the reform process. The manifesto encouraged efforts by the populace to defend freedom of speech and press, and prevent the election of right wing conservatives.

Accordingly, Vaculik appealed to ordinary citizens to establish their own watchdog committees throughout the

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<sup>9</sup> Jan Rychlik, “The ‘Prague Spring’ and the Warsaw Pact Invasion,” in *The Prague Spring and the Warsaw Pact Invasion of Czechoslovakia, 1968: Forty years Later*, ed. M. Mark Stolarik, (Mundelein, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 2010), 46.

<sup>10</sup> Valenta, *Soviet Intervention*, 171.

<sup>11</sup> Valenta, *Soviet Intervention*, 14-15.



country as a loyal counterweight and, if need be, to launch strikes. In doing so, he unintentionally gave Czechoslovak neo-conservatives and Soviets precisely the evidence they sought of a cabal out to destroy the party's power.<sup>12</sup>

### **The Soviet's Dissolution of Trust**

As the various multi-lateral talks were completed, the apprehension level amongst the Soviet leadership increased. They were unconvinced that the CPCZ still had undeniable control of the Czechoslovak government. They also grew suspicious of the communist party's leader Dubcek, who Brezhnev personally feared was "not a man of strong will" and "inexperienced, he doesn't understand, or is he a sly fox?"<sup>13</sup> Reasonably so, the Soviet leadership and Eastern bloc allies grew more and more anxiousness over the changes in Czechoslovakia. Their concerns increased rapidly as they witnessed a similar level of anti-Soviet tendencies and rhetoric as during the 1956 Hungarian uprising. What's more, the increased freedom of speech continued to provide forums for Czechoslovak society and the media to express open contempt for the USSR.

During many of the multi-lateral meetings, the Czechoslovak leaders were asked directly to present their plans to control the reform movement. Soviets wanted assurances that a counter-revolution against socialism and the communist party could be prevented. In one meeting, Brezhnev verbally attacked Dubcek for failing to clearly define what is understood by democratization and liberalization. In his mind, the anti-Soviet discussions taking place in the emancipated media and the ousting of old functionaries were evidence of a counter-revolutionary conspiracy, which he alleged was led by literary scholars.

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<sup>12</sup> Kieran Williams, *The Prague Spring and its Aftermath: Czechoslovak Politics 1968-1970*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 90.

<sup>13</sup> Williams, *Prague Spring*, 115.

With what appeared to be genuine emotion, he invoked Hungary in 1956 as proof that assaults on the party always begin with seemingly benign little groups of writers.<sup>14</sup>

Dubcek and other Czechoslovak leaders worked hard to reaffirm their commitment to the Warsaw Pact and the communist party; to convince Soviet leadership that counter-revolution will not occur. They made numerous efforts to slow the reform process down to satisfy Warsaw Pact demands and get the situation under control. In fact, recent evidence supports the sincerity of Dubcek and the party leadership as they pleaded with the unbelieving Soviet Politburo.

Unlike the events of 1956 in Hungary, Czech opposition did not resort to the armed uprising that occurred in the streets of Budapest.<sup>15</sup> No organized anti-socialist or even anti-communist force appeared within the republic before, during, or immediately after the “Prague Spring.” Apparently, “hardly anyone in Czechoslovakia envisaged a return to the capitalist system. Almost everybody wanted democracy, keeping the fundamental principles of the common ownership of the means of production...It was a movement to establish what has come to be known as ‘socialism with a human face’, or as it was called much more often...democratic socialism.”<sup>16</sup>

However, the circumstances that initiated the Hungary invasion in 1956 were relevant to the Czechoslovak crisis. Soviet leadership received requests from the Hungarian Communist party for military assistance to put-down the revolutionary forces. In doing so, the invasion was legitimized by the leaders of Hungary. Very much like the Hungary example, Brezhnev received a letter signed by numerous anti-

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<sup>14</sup> Williams, *Prague Spring*, 72.

<sup>15</sup> Dawisha, *The Kremlin*, 350.

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Oxley, Alex Pravada and Andrew Ritchie, *Czechoslovakia*, (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1973), xxx.

reformist members of the CPCZ requesting military assistance to prevent a liberal coup within the party.<sup>17</sup>

### **August 1968 Warsaw Pact Invasion**

Throughout the crisis, Soviet leadership had omnipresent concerns about “the immutability of the western borders of the socialist system...and the defense of those borders.”<sup>18</sup> In addition, a perceived lack of efforts from Dubcek and the CPCZ leadership became a major justification for invasion. As a result, the Soviet Union moved to end the Czechoslovak experiment with democratic socialism.

On August 20, about 165,000 Warsaw Pact troops with tanks, aircraft, and equipment, made up the first wave of the invasion. Soviet, Polish, Hungarian, and Bulgarian troops attacked and occupied Czechoslovakia from East Germany, Poland, Hungary and the Soviet Union. In an attempt to justify the action internationally, the USSR declared they were responding to an alleged appeal for help from some CPCZ leaders to put-down a right-wing counter-revolution.<sup>19</sup>

Within a week, after further contingents arrived, approximately half a million foreign soldiers and more than 6,000 tanks were roaming over Czechoslovak territory. Although they started seizing state offices and utilities, the armies had not been dispatched to establish an occupation government. Their arrival was coordinated (albeit hastily and poorly) with Czechoslovak conservatives and neo-conservatives who had signaled their willingness to take power and fulfill all the promises made by Dubcek. Knowing that they could not rely on the pro-reform Czechoslovak army officer corps or of the bewildered security police, these conspirators in Prague and Bratislava needed external intervention, a *coup de main* to support their *coup d'etat*.

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<sup>17</sup> Dawisha, *The Kremlin*, 351.

<sup>18</sup> Dawisha, *The Kremlin*, 347.

<sup>19</sup> Panek and Tuma, *History of the Czech Lands*, 555.

The armed intervention was intended to install a more reliable regime in Prague, intimidate the 'counter-revolutionary' forces into submission, and signal to the world that the Soviet Union would only enter into détente from a position of strength, with its sphere of influence unassailable and united. Though the Soviets anticipated costs, including the outrage of communists in Western Europe, they calculated (a) that the pay-offs of intervention would be greater than the costs, and (b) that the costs of intervening would be less than those of not intervening.<sup>20</sup>

The occupation did in fact outrage many nations throughout the world, to include the communist parties of western governments. Many of the reformist politicians, to include Dubcek, were arrested and flown to the Soviet Union. In the period 19-25 August 1968, large demonstrations and resistance against the intervening Warsaw Pact troops took place. More than 2,500 people were arrested and imprisoned. Many citizens died or were injured when the protests became violent and the occupying military forces opened fire.<sup>21</sup>

In an effort to quell the violence, Soviet leadership reinstated the political status of Dubcek and the reformists. These actions did not occur before Dubcek and others were convinced to sign a treaty which defined several legal control measures allowing Soviet troops and Soviet civilian and military advisers to remain in Czechoslovakia. The legal measures also provided the new Soviet influenced regime with the ability "...to detain its opponents for weeks without a court order, increase penalties for certain offences, simplify and speed up court proceedings, use a simple procedure to stop the publication of selected periodicals,

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<sup>20</sup> Williams, *Prague Spring*, 112.

<sup>21</sup> Panek and Tuma, *History of the Czech Lands*, 562.

dissolve social organizations, and dismiss people from jobs and universities.”<sup>22</sup>

In April 1969, Dubcek, who was manipulated completely by the Soviets and no longer popular with the public, was dismissed as General Secretary of the CPCZ and replaced by Soviet favorite, Gustav Husak. Under Husak, the political changes and liberties implemented by the reformists were almost entirely dismantled by the end of 1969. Husak's regime purged and punished all liberal or reform minded members of the CPCZ. The country was once again ruled by an oppressive orthodox Communist authority loyal to the Soviet Union. By 1975, Husak also assumed the presidency of Czechoslovakia. In December 1987 Husak resigned as CPCZ General Secretary, and was succeeded by another communist hard-liner, Milos Jakes. Nevertheless, Husak maintained his position as the country's president where he remained in power until the outcome of the 1989 Velvet Revolution.

### **Summary**

As the desire for reform grew in Czechoslovakia in 1968, policies and initiatives were introduced by President Alexander Dubcek and other reform minded leaders to inspire change. The new found freedom and civil liberties were embraced with such fervor by the populace, a severe level of anxiety emerged among the Communist hard-liners. While the reform process took on a life of its own, the concerns of the Soviet Union intensified. Dubcek and his assistants made efforts to slow the process, but change was already embraced by society and their efforts failed. Thus, the Soviet Union led a Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia that restored autocratic Communist rule. Czechoslovakia would maintain the status quo of an oppressive state for 21 years until the life

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<sup>22</sup> Panek and Tuma, *History of the Czech Lands*, 562.

changing events of the 1989 Velvet Revolution. The following chapter examines those events.



### **Chapter 3: 1989 Velvet Revolution**

*In Poland it took ten years, in Hungary ten months, in East Germany ten weeks, in Czechoslovakia it will take ten days to get rid of communism.*

—Timothy Garton Ash  
British Writer

On November 17, 1989, after decades of single-party Communist rule in Czechoslovakia, a peaceful student demonstration sparked a ten-day nationwide movement that would lead to the overthrow of the autocratic regime. Those ten days marked the beginning of a non-violent revolution that occurred over a six-week period between November 17 and December 29 known as the *Velvet Revolution*. It all started as a student gathering to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of an anti-Nazi demonstration that led to the death of university student Jan Opletal. The irony is that the Communist government officially sanctioned the event which ultimately led to their demise.

Prior to the revolution, the hard-line Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPCZ) kept a tight leash over all aspects of the government, military, industry, and society. The CPCZ severely restricted the media from reporting developments in neighboring countries; “even censoring news from the Soviet Union, whose own period of *glasnost* precipitated all these gyrations.”<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the failure of the 1968 Prague Spring Revolution and the dreadful Soviet invasion still resonated in the minds of most of society and created an attitude of political indifference amongst its citizens.

For months prior to the revolution, the US State Department was hard at work monitoring the political and social situation in Czechoslovakia through the US Embassy in Prague. As democratic

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Nollen, *Culture Shock! Czech Republic*, (Portland, OR: Graphic Arts Center Publishing, 2005), 24.

reform was spreading throughout Eastern Europe, American Ambassador to Czechoslovakia, Shirley Temple Black, and her staff were convinced that a democratic movement would not occur in Czechoslovakia.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, they focused on reporting the reactions of the government of Czechoslovakia (GOC) to recent developments and their latest initiatives to realign themselves with more conservative nations like Romania and the People's Republic of China. Top embassy priorities at the time also included improving bi-lateral relations with the US and keeping pressure on the GOC pertaining to human rights violations.

During the last two months of 1989, over a thousand telegrams were sent back-and-forth between the US Embassy in Prague and the US State Department in Washington DC. In 1999, most of those documents were declassified, to include the Ambassador's daily situation reports. Those reports serve as a primary source of information that graphically illustrates the events which transpired during the Velvet Revolution.

### **Friday, November 17, 1989**

As mentioned, the demonstration began as a non-violent commemoration that quickly assumed an anti-regime quality as 40-50,000 "students marched through central Prague calling for freedom, an end to Communist rule, and the ouster of the present Communist leadership."<sup>3</sup> While the peaceful procession made its way toward Wenceslas Square, riot police awaited the march about half way to their destination at Narodni Street (National Avenue). An hour long stand-off occurred as the police blocked the route to Wenceslas Square. The students staged a sit-in, showing no opposition to the police, and even

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<sup>2</sup> US Ambassador Shirley Temple Black, "Czechoslovak Rumors of Senior Party Changes," *Prague 07892; Priority* (CZ: American Embassy Prague, 9 Nov 1989), 1. Document is now declassified.

<sup>3</sup> US Ambassador Shirley Temple Black, "Brutal Supression of Czech Students' Demonstration," *Prague 08082; Niact Immediate* (CZ: American Embassy Prague, 18 Nov 1989), 1. Document is now declassified.



offered flowers to some of them. What occurred next is best described by Ambassador Black in her telegram back to Washington:

Shortly before 21:00, riot police, newly reinforced with special Red Beret Action Squads and fatigue-clad People's Militia, carried out a series of truncheon charges into the crowd. Numerous demonstrators, as well as foreign journalists, trapped within the street cordon were badly beaten. The police then began making arrests and using an armored personnel carrier with battering ram to force the people out into now open side streets. Within 30 minutes the street was clear. Busloads of those arrested as well as ambulances carrying injured were noted leaving the scene for several minutes afterwards. According to reports, one student has died of injuries and at least 13 persons were seriously injured and required hospitalization...The number of injured was certainly much higher than the figure of 13. Embassy Officers saw scores of young demonstrators bleeding or limping from the demonstration site. Many were not seeking immediate medical assistance for fear that their names would be taken by the authorities.<sup>4</sup>

Western journalists were particularly targeted by the riot police as a reporter from the *Chicago Tribune* suffered head wounds requiring 16 stitches. As many as nine others from the likes of CNN, ABC, BBC, AP, *Boston Globe*, and *LA Times* were beaten, knocked unconscious, had their cameras confiscated or smashed, and were held by police.<sup>5</sup>

### **Saturday, November 18, 1989**

Reports varied on the number of demonstrators injured and arrested that day, but it was confirmed immediately that Alexander Dubcek, leader of the failed 1968 Prague Spring Revolution, was among the later. The official GOC Ministry of Interior counts indicated 24 injured and 143 people detained.<sup>6</sup> This official report contrasts with local accounts indicating more than 150 individuals were injured and

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<sup>4</sup> Black, *Prague 08082*, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Black, *Prague 08082*, 3.

<sup>6</sup> US Ambassador Shirley Temple Black, "Czechoslovak Press Coverage of Demonstration Aftermath Shows Contradictory Lines," *Prague 08106; Immediate* (CZ: American Embassy Prague, 20 Nov 1989), 2. Document is now declassified.

many more detained. Radio Free Europe also reported that evening that a student, Martin Smid, died due to wounds sustained during the previous day's events.

The populace immediately took action throughout the country by taking to the streets again on Saturday evening. Although these demonstrations were smaller (only 1,000 people marched through Prague), citizens from all walks of life participated with the students. Performance theaters in Prague, Bratislava, and other cities throughout the country immediately shut down. Instead, the theaters were used as public meeting places for dissident organizations, such as Charter 77, to plan future demonstrations and protests. University students, along with theater employees and actors throughout the country, immediately went on strike. Students and reform leaders called upon the public to show their support for the reform movement by participating in a two-hour nationwide strike on November 27. Since the government controlled all media sources, posters were located in public places throughout the country and messages were broadcast over Radio Free Europe.

While the public reacted to the events of the previous evening, the GOC immediately began to conduct damage control. They attempted to mitigate the effects of the brutal suppression through televised addresses by senior Communist leaders requesting that the nation remain calm. They also dispatched riot police to monitor the actions of the day's demonstrators; no reports of violence occurred.

Meanwhile, at the US Embassy, reports were transmitted back to the US that provided the details of the 17 November events. Ambassador Black provided verbal protest pertaining to the incidents involving the journalists to the GOC Ministry of Foreign Affairs and she began working on the official diplomatic note of protest. She also recommended to Secretary of State James Baker that the Czechoslovak Ambassador Miroslav Houstecky be called into the State Department to receive protest

from the Secretary personally. She asked that he also notify the Ambassador that the US has cancelled the scheduled visit of CPCZ Ideology Chief, Jan Fojtik, in light of the November 17 events. Lastly, Ambassador Black provided the Secretary with the following observations and insights:

This is the first mass specifically student demonstration since 1969 and represents a watershed event for the [Milos] Jakes [CPCZ] regime. It changes our frame of reference on this regime's longevity. The brutal police treatment of youth will have broad repercussions among the general population...It should remove what trace of legitimacy the regime retains as far as the general public is concerned. Jakes will not be able to pretend...[that the GOC] is serious about speeding up the pace of political reform. Importantly, the police action in its bloody-mindedness could produce divisions which have so far been muted in the Czechoslovak Communist Party leadership. But if this demonstration considerably undercuts the staying power of the Jakes regime, it also shows that the hardliners are not going to leave without a fight...How quickly the Jakes regime passes from the scene, however, may depend now on more than leadership divisions and popular pressure. An important factor, and one that could be decisive, is the Soviet reaction to local developments. Television coverage of CPCZ Ideology Chief Jan Fojtik's return from Moscow last evening showed him a physically shaken man. We have no doubt he heard some tough talk from his Soviet interlocutors and questions about exactly what Jakes and the regime are up to in their talk of reform.<sup>7</sup>

### **Sunday, November 19, 1989**

On Sunday, GOC efforts to locate Martin Smid and his family were successful. As a result, the CPCZ controlled media ran news cables and interviews with the student that denied reports of his death. GOC officials "specifically blamed Voice of America for having maliciously presented the report. For his action of passing along information to Western journalists on the reports of Smid's death, Peter Uhl, a member...of the Independent East European Information Agency...[was]

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<sup>7</sup> Black, *Prague 08082*, 4.

arrested by authorities and charged with damaging the interests of the republic abroad.”<sup>8</sup>

Government officials continued to appear on television asking the nation to remain calm and to get back to their daily lives. Authorities again dispatched riot police to mitigate any hostile escalations among the demonstrations. On Sunday evening, mass protests continued throughout the country. This time the total participants marching through Prague reached a level of 25,000 people. Although, riot police were present, demonstrators were not interfered with as long as they remained within vicinity of Wenceslas Square and National Avenue. Concurrently, prominent members of Charter 77 and other dissident activists, to include famous playwright and dissident Vaclav Havel, were meeting in theaters in Prague and Bratislava for the second day. As a result of those meetings, two reform activist organizations were established. In Prague, the “Civic Forum,” and in Bratislava, the “Public Against Violence,” organizations were formed to represent Czechs and Slovaks respectively. Although two separate organizations, they cooperated together; with the Civic Forum taking the lead and Havel as their chosen head.<sup>9</sup>

Also on Sunday, American Ambassador Black’s formal written notification was provided to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It informed the GOC of the US government’s strongest protest pertaining to the events that occurred on 17 November. In the note, she listed each of the American journalists that were targeted by police, the injuries, and medical treatment required, as well as the media equipment that was destroyed. The Ambassador was troubled by the events, even though the US Embassy was notified twice prior to the 17<sup>th</sup> that the GOC could not

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<sup>8</sup> US Ambassador Shirley Temple Black, “Demonstrations Continue over Weekend in Prague,” *Prague O8097; Immediate* (CZ: American Embassy Prague, 20 Nov 1989), 2. Document is now declassified.

<sup>9</sup> US Ambassador Shirley Temple Black, “Czechoslovak Independents Establish New Organization and List Agenda of Demands,” *Prague O8108; Immediate* (CZ: American Embassy Prague, 20 Nov 1989), 1. Document is now declassified.

ensure the safety of foreigners, diplomats, or journalists within vicinity of any public demonstrations. Ambassador Black pointed out “that these [incidents] have not been accidental, but in all cases have involved clear identification of journalists before the detention or attack. Therefore, the GOC cannot disclaim responsibility for the deliberate actions of its police security personnel.”<sup>10</sup>

### **Monday, November 20, 1989**

Aside from the efforts of the GOC to clear up reports on Smid’s death, a level of skepticism still endured throughout society. People questioned the validity of the television and newspaper reports. The communist controlled daily newspaper *Rude Pravo* ran columns charging that student “self-appointed leaders” were to blame for sabotaging the approved annual anti-Nazi commemoration. The GOC declared that the riot police acted with restraint and reiterated again that the claim of a student death was false. “A statement by the Interior Ministry described the death rumors as deliberate manipulation of people’s minds and an effort to arouse hostile emotions.”<sup>11</sup> However, speculation continued that a demonstrator was killed and the damage to the GOC’s credibility was done. The rumor provided the Civic Forum and student groups the necessary catalyst to spread the strikes throughout the country.

The [Civic Forum] handled the struggle in a surprisingly effective way. Surprising since these were mostly intellectuals who were not used to engaging in politics. Nonetheless everything they undertook seemed to work. Like the Russian Bolsheviks in 1917 they sent out plenipotentiary commissars all over the country to establish structured forums. To paralyze the communist administration they sent delegations to all the strategic political bodies, such as the Federal Government, Parliament, the Presidency, the Czech Government, and the Czech National Council. They were either refused audience

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<sup>10</sup> US Ambassador Shirley Temple Black, “Embassy Protest of Attack on American Journalists During November 17-19 Demonstrations in Prague,” *Prague 08087; Immediate* (CZ: American Embassy Prague, 20 Nov 1989), 1. Document is now declassified.

<sup>11</sup> Black, *Prague 08106*, 2.

or answered evasively, yet these delegations were always accompanied by cheering crowds and clearly intimidated the bureaucrats. Above all the opposition was seen to be taking action, while the communists did nothing.<sup>12</sup>

Along with these formal actions by the Civic Forum, the student groups launched a Strike Committee campaign to secure the support and participation of the workers, farmers, miners and police in the 27 November strike. Most of the population rallied around the striking students. According to US Ambassador Black's telegram back to the State Department that day, student groups "had already received several delegations of representatives of factory workers who had pledged support and...promises that coal miners in the Ostrava area would participate in the strike."<sup>13</sup> High school students and faculty, along with various labor unions throughout the country, mobilized in support of the university students and Civic Forum. "Paradoxically, the Communist City University Council [in Prague] also joined the strike and because of its central location and excellent office facilities soon became communications headquarters for the overall coordination of the strike."<sup>14</sup>

By 4:00 p.m. that day, well over 150,000 people took part in the largest demonstration yet in Prague. The protests were mostly peaceful and police and security forces made no attempts to intervene other than closed the bridges that lead to Prague Castle. During the event, Communist Youth Union leader, Vasil Mohorita spoke in front of the masses in which he also condemned the actions of the police on 17 November.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, demonstrations continued in other major cities

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<sup>12</sup> John F.N. Bradley, *Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution: A Political Analysis* (Boulder, East European Monographs, 1992), 80.

<sup>13</sup> US Ambassador Shirley Temple Black, "Student Strike Situation Report," *Prague O8153; Immediate* (CZ: American Embassy Prague, 21 Nov 1989), 1. Document is now declassified.

<sup>14</sup> Bradley, *Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution*, 78

<sup>15</sup> Bradley, *Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution*, 79.



throughout Czechoslovakia, to include Bratislava, Ostrava, and Brno; while theaters and schools in those cities closed as well.

Moreover, mass media united in support of the Civic Forum and student strikes. An independent journalist union was formed with approximately 400 journalists who denounced the police actions on 17 November and the Communist Party's monopoly on power within the government. "The *Independent Press Centre* released its first issue containing not only nationwide news, but also the proclamation of Civic Forum, which began to have the expected avalanche effect."<sup>16</sup> In an effort to reduce bias, state television journalists permitted the population to hear the demonstrating actors' and students' sides of the story. Lastly, the GOC and CPCZ received a serious demoralizing blow, delivered from where they least expected. "In a reaction from the Soviet Union, Soviet press spokesman Gerasimov was shown on Czechoslovak Television saying that the demonstrations were an internal matter for Czechoslovakia, [and] that they represented a part of the current process of democratization in Eastern Europe."<sup>17</sup>

### **Tuesday, November 21, 1989**

Day four of the revolution, started with over 200,000 people participating in peaceful demonstrations in the streets of Prague. This day marked the first public address to the masses, by the Civic Forum's opposition leaders, to include Vaclav Havel and socialist party member Karel Sedlacek. Reports from the US Embassy in Prague outlined the Civic Forum's position:

The organization seeks to participate in a dialogue with the Czechoslovak Government to resolve the current crisis but has posited four demands which must be met before negotiations can begin. These are:

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<sup>16</sup> Bradley, *Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution*, 80.

<sup>17</sup> US Ambassador Shirley Temple Black, "Demonstrations in Prague and Other Czechoslovak Cities November 20," *Prague O8144; Immediate* (CZ: American Embassy Prague, 21 Nov 1989), 3. Document is now declassified.

(1) The immediate resignation of the Presidium members directly connected with the 1968 [Prague Spring] invasion and post-invasion normalization and rule...

(2) The resignation of [the] Prague Party boss...and the Federal Minister of Interior...who are held responsible for police repression against demonstrators.

(3) The creation of a special commission including Civic Forum members to investigate who is guilty for police action against demonstrators and to recommend punishments.

(4) The release of all prisoners of conscience.

...the Forum's ultimate goals are free elections and a new constitution in which no party is designated as having a leading role. The Forum welcomes anyone, including Communists, who seeks in a peaceful manner a transition to a democratic society...[and it] supports a two-hour general strike called for November 27.<sup>18</sup>

Accordingly, CPCZ leadership also took action to address the population that day. In an address on federal television, CPCZ General Secretary Jakes acknowledged the need for social and economic change and welcomed dialogue, in his words, "with all those who are in favor of socialism." Again, he maintained the hard-line intention to deal with the problems as defined by the laws of the socialist state and the constitution; in his words, "everybody must respect this."<sup>19</sup>

Prague Party communist chief Stephan addressed the Prague Party Committee concerning the aim of those responsible for organizing the demonstrations. He contended that they desired to achieve nothing more than to seize control of the government for themselves. "They were stirring up emotions in youth by the false claims of a death and through appeals over the 'alleged' brutality of the police. They had even managed to manipulate some of the media...He concluded that 'chaos is not our

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<sup>18</sup> US Ambassador Shirley Temple Black, "More on the Civic Forum," *Prague O8156; Immediate* (CZ: American Embassy Prague, 21 Nov 1989), 2. Document is now declassified.

<sup>19</sup> US Ambassador Shirley Temple Black, "November 21 Events in Prague and Media Reaction," *Prague O8184* (CZ: American Embassy Prague, 22 Nov 1989), 3. Document is now declassified.



program. We demand and support order’.”<sup>20</sup> To achieve that order, the CPCZ planned on utilizing up to 40,000 troops in Prague, but the action was either called-off or never came to fruition. Presumably the operations were cancelled because the army refused to intervene or the CPCZ was concerned about international reactions and a negative Soviet response.

Conversely, the Czechoslovak Prime Minister Ladislav Adamec conducted an unauthorized meeting that day with a delegation of leaders from various opposition groups. “Adamec realized that their demands would have to be addressed, yet Jakes and the Party leadership did not want him to negotiate on their behalf as this would increase his influence and possibly give him a leading role.”<sup>21</sup> In attendance were members of the Civic Forum, student strike committees, university faculty, miners, actors and musicians. During the meeting, Adamec discussed many of the same themes argued by Jakes, such as the government’s plans to initiate reforms to address social and economic problems. However, he was much more open to the concerns of the opposition groups. By the meeting’s outcome, the delegation received two guarantees from Adamec. He assured them that the army would not be used against the people and that an investigation into the 17 November actions of the police and security would be conducted and the findings released to the public.

That day the Czechoslovak Catholic primate, Cardinal Frantisek Tomasek, also released a public statement in support of the demonstrations throughout the country. US Ambassador Black summarized his message as follows:

He declared that after four decades of injustice and denial of the basic rights allowed even in new Third World countries, it was impossible to have any confidence in a leadership which was unable to tell the truth. He reviewed all the regime’s attempts to suppress the Catholic Church over the

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<sup>20</sup> Black, *Prague 08184*, 3.

<sup>21</sup> Bradley, *Czechoslovakia’s Velvet Revolution*, 84.

years, and the efforts of the Church to act as a spokesman for popular complaints—which were ‘arrogantly ignored’...Tomasek pointed out that neighboring countries had succeeded in breaking the totalitarian system and that ‘we must not wait, we must act.’ His statement was ignored by the [federal paper] *Rude Pravo*, but printed in full in the People’s Party paper *Lidova Demokracie*.<sup>22</sup>

### **Wednesday, November 22, 1989**

On this day the Civic Forum sent letters to US President Bush and Soviet Premier Gorbachev, informing them of the current crisis in Czechoslovakia, and asking them to discuss the 1968 Prague Spring invasion at their upcoming summit at Malta. “The Civic Forum argues that the Soviets cannot ignore responsibility for a regime they installed 20 years ago and that a Soviet condemnation of the invasion would remove what legitimacy the current GOC leadership has.”<sup>23</sup> The Civic Forum was not seeking the support of the US and USSR, only to ensure that neither country would back a decision by the CPCZ to use force.

While mass demonstrations continued that morning in Prague with over 250,000 protesters, as well as 50,000 protesters in Bratislava, a press conference was called by the Civic Forum. They publicized a number of administrative updates intended to strengthen its legitimacy as a political entity and its ability to speak on behalf of the people. Vaclav Klaus (current Czech Republic President) led a group of independent economists who joined the Civic Forum and began working on an economic program to be implemented if and when the GOC collapsed. “The Forum announced its new press spokesman would be Vaclav Maly, a Catholic priest and Charter 77 signatory.”<sup>24</sup> The press conference also reiterated the Forum’s support for the upcoming general strike on 27 November, and provided an update on all factories and

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<sup>22</sup> Black, *Prague 08184*, 4.

<sup>23</sup> US Ambassador Shirley Temple Black, “Situation Report, November 22, Prague,” *Prague 08198; Immediate* (CZ: American Embassy Prague, 22 Nov 1989), 1. Document is now declassified.

<sup>24</sup> Black, *Prague 08198*, 2.

organizations that already committed to participate. Lastly, the new spokesman provided a brief summary of the previous day's meeting with Prime Minister Adamec to the press.

Meanwhile, the CPCZ hardliners were still relentlessly pursuing efforts to hold onto power and maintain the current communist government. The CPCZ sent representatives to major factories throughout the country to recruit support for the regime and discourage participation in the strikes. The federal media still broadcast a pro-regime message, while all other Czechoslovak media were placed under strict surveillance. General Secretary Jakes appeared again on federal television, this time accompanied by the Czechoslovak Minister of Education. They called for students to return to school and allow the government to handle reforms through socialism. Yet, "these television appeals served no purpose and showed beyond doubt the blindness of the Communist rulers. They inhabited another world, addressing non-existent humans, for the real people pledged themselves to demonstrate peacefully again tomorrow at the Square, in complete defiance of the communists."<sup>25</sup>

#### **Thursday, November 23, 1989**

Day six of the revolution was highlighted by the growth of demonstrators and Civic Forum supporters turning out in droves throughout the country. By this day it was also evident to the CPCZ that change must be implemented quickly or the regime will crumble. "Even the politically obtuse Jakes could only think of two ways out of the crisis, either he had to negotiate under duress with the opposition, or he had to reverse the situation by the force of arms."<sup>26</sup> He quickly realized that the latter option was not possible, since the Soviet Ambassador to Czechoslovakia informed him the previous day that Soviet forces stationed there would not get involved in this internal matter. He also

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<sup>25</sup> Bradley, *Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution*, 87.

<sup>26</sup> Bradley, *Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution*, 93.

knew that his own military would not use force against their countrymen. "...On this day Army General Vaclavik...presently [the] minister of defense, declared on television...that the army would not fight the people. The reason was obvious: soldiers would not obey their officers' orders."<sup>27</sup>

The growing crisis created a staggering amount of infighting amongst the political leaders of the GOC and CPCZ members. As they prepared for the following day's scheduled Central Committee plenum meeting, the communists were split between two camps, the hard-line conservative Communist General Secretary Jakes, and the more open-minded and conciliatory Prime Minister Adamec. However, by evening time, none of this mattered anymore. They finally realized that "...no Czechoslovak Communist leader could order a real massacre of democracy as their Chinese counterparts had done in June. They were deeply demoralized...even the most desperate Stalinists were now awaiting dismissals with resignation: in the circumstances they could do nothing else."<sup>28</sup>

Thursday was also a day of continued speeches by the leaders of the opposition. Most notably, Vaclav Havel addressed the Prague demonstration, while former Czechoslovak President, Alexander Dubcek, addressed Slovaks in Bratislava. Havel's message in particular served as the latest Civic Forum proclamation. In which he stated,

...the Civic Forum is prepared to initiate a dialogue between society and the actual power and has at its disposal qualified forces from all spheres of social life to engage in a free and concrete discussion about the ways leading to changes in the political and economic circumstances in our country.

At the moment the situation is open, full of possibilities and offers two certainties:

(1) There can be no return to the past totalitarian government which led our country to the edge of an

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<sup>27</sup> Bradley, *Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution*, 93.

<sup>28</sup> Bradley, *Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution*, 96.

absolute spiritual, moral, political, economic and ecological abyss.

(2) We all want to live in a free, democratic and prosperous Czechoslovakia, which must become part of Europe again, and that we shall never give up this ideal, whatever happens in the coming days.

The Civic Forum appeals to all citizens of Czechoslovakia to support the general strike on Monday, 27 November 1989 at noon...We are opponents of violence, we do not want revenge, we want to live as a dignified, free people, who have a right to determine the fate of its country and future generations.<sup>29</sup>

By the day's end, the battle for favor of the population was won by the Civic Forum. The general strike planned for the 27<sup>th</sup> was universally approved and factories and organizations were pledging their support in increasing numbers. Even Communist branches throughout the country supported Civic Forum proposals and pushed for reforms within the Party statute. Most importantly, it appeared that "...asking for reconciliation without vengeance appealed to all [of society] and transformed the struggle into a velvet revolution without violence."<sup>30</sup>

### **Friday, November 24, 1989**

Late Friday afternoon close to 500,000 demonstrators assembled in Prague's Wenceslas Square to hear speeches from Vaclav Havel and Alexander Dubcek. Hundreds of thousands more citizens demonstrated in cities elsewhere in the country, including Plzen, Brno, Ostrava, and Bratislava. They were anxiously awaiting the results of the CPCZ Central Committee plenum session in hopes for major leadership changes. That afternoon Havel was also recognized internationally for his relentless pursuit toward democracy and human rights. He was awarded the prestigious Olof Palme Prize by the Swedish foreign minister, which symbolized his growing foreign influence.

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<sup>29</sup> Bradley, *Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution*, 94-95.

<sup>30</sup> Bradley, *Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution*, 95.

With a renewed sense of liberty, media coverage of the demonstrations and political opposition speeches increased. “In anticipation of communist decline, the state television began to screen the video cassette of the 17 November events.”<sup>31</sup> Although they too were optimistic, Civic Forum and student groups continued to plan for the 27 November strike and actively recruit willing participants. According to US embassy officials in Prague, the dissident groups “...indicated that whatever the outcome of the plenum, the strike should go ahead as a sign of popular solidarity and as a way to continue pressure on the regime for change.”<sup>32</sup>

Sometime after 7:00 p.m. that evening, a reporter who attended the meeting ran to Wenceslas Square to report that Communist General Secretary Jakes, as well as his entire Party Presidium and Secretariat, had resigned. The announcement was immediately followed by the loud cheering and roaring of the excited Prague crowd. “At the Forum’s regular press conference everyone was greatly satisfied with the resignation of the entire leadership and an optimistic toast was drunk to ‘A free Czechoslovakia’.”<sup>33</sup> However, unfortunately for the public and leaders of the opposition, the celebration would prove to be a bit premature.

As the night progressed and additional information was leaked from the plenum proceedings, it became apparent that the leadership changes were more cosmetic than reform inspired. The jubilation from earlier subsided as the public realized that communist hardliners remained in control and reform-minded leaders like Prime Minister Adamec were dismissed from the presidium. US Ambassador Black summarized the new leadership of the CPCZ Presidium as “a smaller,

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<sup>31</sup> Bradley, *Czechoslovakia’s Velvet Revolution*, 100.

<sup>32</sup> US Ambassador Shirley Temple Black, “CPCZ Plenum Opens amid Rumors of Senior Personnel Changes and New Signs of Political Ferment,” *Prague O8208; Immediate* (CZ: American Embassy Prague, 24 Nov 1989), 4. Document is now declassified.

<sup>33</sup> Bradley, *Czechoslovakia’s Velvet Revolution*, 100.



younger but still very conservative body made up largely of 'Jake's stepchildren', mostly men who rose in the party during the post-1968 normalization."<sup>34</sup> In her daily telegram to the US State Department she provided the following comments in response to the changes:

While these personnel changes represent some concession to popular pressure for resignations, they leave the hardliners in control of the party apparatus. Despite Jake's ouster, the "Jake's leadership" remains entrenched. The 1968 old guard may continue to influence the Party political situation from retirement, much as Slovak leader Vasil Bilak has done.

The new General Secretary is an unknown quantity. His advantages are youth and the lack of a past, specifically a role in 1968. The smaller number now in the Presidium should give him an early opportunity to appoint his own men. Horeni, in speaking at the press conference, said Urbanek would be considering early ways of reshuffling responsibilities within the Party. Urbanek has never struck us, however, as a forceful or charismatic character. And he has shied away from the media. The question that immediately comes to mind is whether he is simply a front man for the old leadership or a compromise figure.

The new Presidium has one particularly forceful personality, Prague Party boss Stepan. Drive, ambition and opportunism have enabled him to survive public calls for his resignation, but the retention of this high-profile hardliner has already sparked negative public reactions. The retention of Stepan is one of the clearest signals that the Presidium personnel changes should not be read prematurely as a reform outcome for the plenum.<sup>35</sup>

### **Saturday, November 25, 1989**

The new CPCZ leadership held their first press conference early Saturday morning announcing the names of the newly appointed Presidium and Secretariat members. They also publicized a nine-point action program intended to deal with the current political crisis. Nevertheless, the action plan failed to attend to the demands of the Civic

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<sup>34</sup> US Ambassador Shirley Temple Black, "Jake's Stepchildren Inherit the CPCZ," *Prague O8237; Immediate* (CZ: American Embassy Prague, 25 Nov 1989), 3. Document is now declassified.

<sup>35</sup> Black, *Prague O8237*, 5-6.

Forum and other opposition groups, and any indication of initiating democratic reforms was absent.

As the day progressed, it became apparent that the CPCZ was struggling to overcome the party's internal divides. "The Communist Party was so hopelessly divided that it could not even agree on concessions to the popular protest movement. Talks with the opposition were again postponed, but they would have to take place soon, as crowds might lose patience and the consequences were unpredictable."<sup>36</sup> Meanwhile, Prague Party Chairman, Miroslav Stepan was finally forced to resign and President Husak began implementing his own concessions as he halted criminal proceedings against eight people who were arrested during the demonstrations.

While the CPCZ and GOC leadership struggled with their internal issues that morning, a crowd of approximately 100,000 people gathered at St. Vitus Cathedral to celebrate the canonization of Agnes of Bohemia. The Czechoslovak Catholic primate and Civic Forum supporter, Cardinal Tomasek, presided over the ceremony and it was televised for the first time.

The success of the canonization ceremony was just the beginning of a series of accomplishments that Saturday. Ambassador Black proclaimed:

A crowd conservatively estimated at one-half million gathered on the parade ground of Letna Park Saturday afternoon for a Civic Forum-sponsored rally. The demonstration proved remarkable in a number of ways: (1) It was the largest demonstration ever in Prague, (2) the demonstration was televised by Czechoslovak Television virtually in its entirety, and without any censorship, (3) Alexander Dubcek spoke and condemned the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion, the first such criticism on the Czechoslovak media of the invasion in 20 years, and (4) Vaclav Havel publicly urged those present to support Prime Minister Adamec.

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<sup>36</sup>Bradley, *Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution*, 100.



While Saturday's demonstration was progressing, lower-level units of the Communist Party...were breaking into open revolt against the conservative top Party leadership...Following a day of revolts in lower Party structures, Karel Urbanek appeared on television Saturday night...[he] indicated that he was ready to talk to anyone concerned about the future fate of Czechoslovakia.<sup>37</sup>

### **Sunday, November 26, 1989**

Sunday morning began with the publishing of a special edition of the communist newspaper *Rude Pravo*. It included pictures and details of the opposition events that transpired the previous day. Saturday's demonstrations proved to be a success as Prime Minister Adamec, representing the National Front delegation of the GOC, requested to meet with Havel for the first time. This initial event was referred to as a "negotiating" session intended to open up future dialogue between the two camps. Adamec was very careful to ensure that all participants understood that he was representing the GOC and not the CPCZ Presidium, of whom he was no longer a member. "Adamec on Friday night apparently refused a seat on the [new] CPCZ Presidium in an effort to distance himself from the hardline conservatives and remain in a position to lead the government side in any possible dialogue..."<sup>38</sup>

As the session transpired, Havel provided the Prime Minister with a list of demands similar to previous lists. Adamec agreed to all the demands, but only if Havel called off the strike. "Havel explained patiently that the strike could only be stopped after the implementation of his demands."<sup>39</sup> In an effort to test Adamec's good will and authority to make decisions, Havel requested that over a dozen political prisoners be released. The GOC responded with the release of six prisoners and

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<sup>37</sup> US Ambassador Shirley Temple Black, "Dramatic Weekend Developments Show Rapid Rise in Popular Support for Change," *Prague 08245; Immediate* (CZ: American Embassy Prague, 27 Nov 1989), 3. Document is now declassified.

<sup>38</sup> Black, *Prague 08245*, 3.

<sup>39</sup> Bradley, *Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution*, 101.

Adamec's agreement to provide a response to all the Civic Forum demands by Tuesday.

Following the talks, Havel invited Adamec to attend that afternoon's demonstration. Havel viewed this as an opportunity to intimidate the Prime Minister through exposure to the opposition masses. Adamec accepted Havel's invitation, believing that he could solve the crisis by addressing the crowd at Letna Park. Upon arrival, he was welcomed with warm cheers from the crowd and received a boisterous roar as he announced the GOC's decision to agree with the demands of the Civic Forum. However, when he attempted to qualify his statement with conditions that must be met first, the crowd became hostile and he had to be escorted to safety.

This incident proved to be a great disappointment for Havel and the Civic Forum. They placed their trust in Adamec as the only decent communist leader within the government. In that instance he proved that party politics were more important to him than the concerns of the nation.

Based on these events, US Ambassador Black reported in her daily memo that:

The Forum has played down its meeting with Adamec on Sunday as not a real dialogue. It presented demands but received no reply. It will be looking to its Tuesday meeting with the Prime Minister as an indicator of regime flexibility. But to insure it keeps the pressure on, it is working with an expanding number of Prague factories to set up "strike alert" committees. These will react with work stoppages as a weapon against the Government and Party in what looks to be prolonged negotiations ahead.<sup>40</sup>

While Civic Forum and GOC engagements took place on Sunday, the CPCZ called an emergency plenum session that morning to deal with

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<sup>40</sup> US Ambassador Shirley Temple Black, "New CPCZ Leadership Tries to Cope with Increasing Opposition Pressure for Reform," *Prague O8247; Niact Immediate* (CZ: American Embassy Prague, 27 Nov 1989), 3. Document is now declassified.

the revolts within the party. General Secretary, Karel Urbanek realized the upheaval was a reaction to the hard line communists elected to replace the previous Presidium. Therefore, he initiated a review of the new cadre during the emergency session. The plenum conducted additional forced resignations and elections in an attempt to fix the failures of the previous plenum two days earlier. As deliberations continued into the next morning, the outcome was a completely modified list of CPCZ Presidium members. According to Ambassador Black, "overall the new list is remarkable for the absence of any personality...[it] is also noteworthy because it shows the real lack of depth of talent that the Party could draw on in the current crisis."<sup>41</sup> It is apparent that Urbanek also recognized this shortcoming as he decided to work with Adamec to raise the GOC's authority and let the party assume a supporting effort.

### **Monday, November 27, 1989**

Day 10 of the revolution began similar to the previous days, but by noon, the mass general strike commenced as planned. Throughout all 59 districts in Czechoslovakia the majority of the population participated in the strike and most major industries shut down. As reported by US Ambassador Black, "...the strike seemed to have universal support. In downtown Prague, [US] Embassy Officers saw only two small shops open: a fruit and vegetable stand and a waffle vendor...The Metro was closed for the full two hours."<sup>42</sup> Television provided live coverage of demonstrations and people walking off the job during the nationwide strike. Interviews of strikers by the media contained messages of open disparagement toward the government and the common theme was an end to communist monocracy.

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<sup>41</sup> Black, *Prague 08247*, 5.

<sup>42</sup> US Ambassador Shirley Temple Black, "Massive Nationwide Strike Supports Civic Forum's Claim to Represent the People," *Prague 08274; Immediate* (CZ: American Embassy Prague, 27 Nov 1989), 2. Document is now declassified.

Overall, the strike was considered a massive success for the student and Civic Forum organizers. For two hours, the operation of the country was essentially brought to a halt as citizens struck in support of democratic freedoms. Ambassador Black observed that “Today’s massive strike support gives substance to the Civic Forum’s claim that it represents a broad popular base. The strike strengthens the Forum’s hand as it moves into an important round of negotiations on Tuesday with government leaders, including Prime Minister Adamec.”<sup>43</sup>

Although the strike was a victory for the opposition, its effects were not readily apparent. Neither the Civic Forum nor the student organizations were aware of the extent of damage to the weakened CPCZ Presidium. Communist influence was completely marginal, with only a few individuals still trying to uphold it. The Party finally acknowledged that they could no longer resist the new found power of civic unity and nationalism. The Civic Forum, on the other hand, continued to press-on as if nothing happened. “Havel had to find another way to administer communism’s coup de grace. Thus the forum recommended that the strike committees transform themselves into forums...If the following day’s formal negotiations with Prime Minister Adamec failed, the Civic Forum would set up a coordination center to mobilize the population.”<sup>44</sup>

In a demonstration Monday evening at Wenceslas Square, the Civic Forum announced that they would not sponsor future demonstrations unless needed. They realized that eleven straight days of demonstrations was wearing on the opposition leadership, as well as the general population. However, the rally did not disperse without the Civic Forum leadership reiterating their demands and down-playing any calls for them to serve as a political party. “They [said] only that the Forum’s goal is a democratic and pluralistic society, and that anyone who shares such

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<sup>43</sup> Black, *Prague 08274*, 2.

<sup>44</sup> Bradley, *Czechoslovakia’s Velvet Revolution*, 104.

a goal is welcome to participate in the Forum's activities."<sup>45</sup> Finally, the evening ended with Vaclav Havel being honored for the second time by foreign dignitaries. In an evening ceremony at the Prague National Theater, German publishers from Frankfurt presented him with another international award.

### **Tuesday, November 28, 1989**

Vaclav Havel entered into Tuesday's talks with Prime Minister Adamec with an enhanced level of international prestige as a result of the previous night's award. On the other hand, Adamec was struggling to prevent the inevitable and maintain his role and that of the new communist leadership. Each side commenced negotiations with a stubborn list of demands; Havel expected a handover of power, while Adamec envisioned power sharing. Control of the government was argued with no resolution in site until both parties finally conceded. Adamec would form a new interim coalition government no later than 3 December, made up of experts in their role of responsibility. The Civic Forum would ensure that the new government "included details concerning free elections and guarantees of freedom of speech, assembly, association, press and religion...if the public finds the coalition-government programs or personnel unsatisfactory, the Civic Forum will seek a new government..."<sup>46</sup>

Progress was also made with regard to constitutional changes. The communists agreed to abolish "the articles guaranteeing the Communist Party's leading role in the country, of the National Front in political life and Marxism-Leninism's privileged position in culture, science, and education...Thus, in fact, the confused totalitarians were abolishing

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<sup>45</sup> US Ambassador Shirley Temple Black, "The Evolving Program and Organization of the Civic Forum," *Prague 08312; Immediate* (CZ: American Embassy Prague, 28 Nov 1989), 1. Document is now declassified.

<sup>46</sup> US Deputy Chief of Mission Theodore E. Russell, "Civic Forum Reaction to November 28 Talks with GOC," *Prague 08342; Immediate* (CZ: American Embassy Prague, 29 Nov 1989), 1. Document is now declassified.

themselves, and the subsequent power handover, when it would come about, would be constitutional in form..."<sup>47</sup> Adamec also agreed to provide the Civic Forum office space within the government buildings, access to the media and freedom to continue to publish its own newspaper, the *Lidove Nivony*.

### **Path to Freedom: November 29 – December 29, 1989**

A summary report provided by the US Embassy in Prague to the US State Department on 29 November reads as follows:

What has occurred in Czechoslovakia over the past 12 days is nothing short of a popular revolution, but a non-violent one. It is a revolution sparked by students and artists in reaction to the brutal suppression on November 17 of a student demonstration and then joined by workers and the great mass of the people. Like the Prague Spring of 1968, this revolution has its roots in the gradual loss of fear by the man in the street of regime repression, but differs from 1968 in that it originated from within the younger generation and not so much from reform elements within the CPCZ. It thus is more of a rejection of the 41 years of the country's Communist past.<sup>48</sup>

Immediately following the Havel-Adamec negotiations on 28 November, both sides expressed content with the progress attained. Civic Forum representatives called on common citizens to return to work or school, but be prepared to conduct further protests if necessary. However, as the days progressed, the struggle to tip the scales of government power in one's favor continued. At the immediate outset of the negotiations, the Communist Party still held 16 out of 21 cabinet positions, to include the strategic Ministers of Defense and Interior. This was an advantage that Adamec sought to keep as part of his strategy for assembling an interim government to be presented on 3 December.

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<sup>47</sup> Bradley, *Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution*, 108.

<sup>48</sup> US Deputy Chief of Mission Theodore E. Russell, "Czechoslovakia's Quiet Revolution and its Prospects," *Prague O8343; Immediate* (CZ: American Embassy Prague, 29 Nov 1989), 1. Document is now declassified.



Consequently, the Civic Forum devised a well thought-out strategy in response. As the Forum continuously pursued constitutional and legislative changes, communist leaders argued amongst themselves on their implementation. That created more and more infighting and rifts amongst the government and party leadership. The Civic Forum took full advantage of those fissures as "...its strategic aims were perfectly clear: the Communist Party, the Legislative and the Executive—indeed the entire system were to be dismantled very gradually, and after self-administered purges, taken over by Civic Forum and its allies. Only then, after a free election, democracy would be restored. There was no time limit fixed for these procedures...they could not win all the battles, but were determined to win the war for democracy, be it at the cost of their lives."<sup>49</sup>

The dedication and persistence of the opposition eventually paid off. After failing to provide a legitimate plan for an interim government (15 out of 20 cabinet ministers selected were communists), Prime Minister Adamec resigned under pressure on 7 December. His deputy prime minister, Marian Calfa, temporarily replaced him and immediately set to work assembling an interim government in cooperation with Civic Forum leaders. Days later, a reasonable temporary government was decided on. This was the first Czechoslovak government in more than 40 years without a Communist majority, holding only 10 of the 21 cabinet ministries. On 10 December President Husak stated publicly that the new government was only a transitional team intended to prepare for free elections in the upcoming year. Then, after swearing-in the interim government members, President Husak resigned immediately. Accordingly, the Federal Assembly was charged with electing an interim successor in 14 days.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Bradley, *Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution*, 109-110.

<sup>50</sup> US Ambassador Shirley Temple Black, "New Czechoslovak Government Sworn In," *Prague O8627; Niact Immediate* (CZ: American Embassy Prague, 11 Dec 1989), 2-4. Document is now declassified.

The Civic Forum strategy led to a dramatic turn-around of government control. In just over one month the communist control of the Federal Assembly, where they previously held 242 out of 350 seats, dissolved into a minority. “The communists were all so confused and intimidated that they voted for their own abolition unanimously. After each new vote scores of communist members were dismissed and Civic Forum leaders took their place.”<sup>51</sup>

### **Summary**

On 29 December, the new Federal Assembly elected Vaclav Havel as the interim president of Czechoslovakia.<sup>52</sup> In addition, Alexander Dubcek was appointed as the Chairman of the Federal Parliament Assembly. Finally, after six weeks of daily struggles, the new interim government was complete. The Velvet Revolution had successfully put an end to communist rule and paved the way for a free and democratic Czechoslovakia. The next chapter analyzes the Velvet Revolution according to the framework developed by Edward Luttwak. Lessons learned will be identified that can be utilized with regard to future revolutions.

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<sup>51</sup> Bradley, *Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution*, 114.

<sup>52</sup> In June 1990 Czechoslovakia held its first free elections and Vaclav Havel was democratically elected to retain the presidency.



## Chapter 4: A Look through Luttwak's Lens

*Without political community there can be no effective norms, and without the norms that arise quite naturally from the values and beliefs of the community, the state is no more than a machine.*

—Edward Luttwak

*Coup d'Etat*

In his book *Coup d'Etat*, author and military strategist Edward Luttwak describes a coup as a method for changing the leadership of a country; very similar to that of a classic revolution, putsch, insurgency, etc. However, as described by Luttwak, “the coup is a political weapon, and its planners have only political resources.”<sup>1</sup> He expounds on this point by stating that “the essence of the coup is the seizure of power within the main decision-making centre of the state and, through this, the acquisition of control over the nation as a whole.”<sup>2</sup> It is a non-violent affair, with a critical aim to avoid bloodshed.

As mentioned previously in the introduction, Luttwak's definition of a coup resembles a non-violent revolution. In fact, the argument is made here that the successful Czech Velvet Revolution was a coup with the assistance of the masses. A key point for the reader throughout this chapter is to understand the similarity between a “coup” and a “non-violent revolution.” They both pertain to non-violent opposition movements in pursuit of political reform.

### When is a Revolution Possible?

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Luttwak, *Coup d'Etat: A Practical Handbook*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 55.

<sup>2</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 50.

Renowned historian and professor of Military Strategy, Doctor Harold Winton, provides a prescription to spark a revolution. According to Dr. Winton, the presence of the following conditions are ideal:

- a psychological awareness and distinct grievance amongst the have-nots of society
- an idea implanted that things can be different
- an individual or group willing to exploit that information and use an event or circumstance to create a “charismatic fire brand”
- an inept or illegitimate government<sup>3</sup>

Dr. Winton’s analysis highlights popular grievances as a catalyst which begins the drive towards reform and change. Yet what is it that causes those grievances? Luttwak attributes those grievances to temporary causal factors that weaken the political system. Some common examples of these temporary factors may include a severe economic crisis with large-scale unemployment and runaway inflation, a long and unsuccessful war, and chronic instability within the government bureaucracy.<sup>4</sup> In any case, these temporary factors diminish the state’s appearance of legitimacy and ability to govern. The environmental conditions become ripe for a coup, revolution, insurgency, or other attempt to seize political power. The ultimate goal of the disaffected people is regime change, which results in a struggle between four groups or forces within the state. These groups are the populace, the current government or regime, the security apparatus of the state, and the media.

### **Role of the Populace and Regime**

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<sup>3</sup> Dr. Harold Winton, “SAASS 644 Irregular Warfare Seminar,” (USAF Air University, 24 Feb 11).

<sup>4</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 31.

For Luttwak, successful governance results from continuing dialogue between a nation's populace and its leaders. This dialogue is brought about by the active interest citizens take in politics. When controversial policy decisions are made, the public responds through the use of pressure groups, petitions, demonstrations, and letters to the press and politicians.<sup>5</sup> However, in many countries the dialogue between the rulers and the ruled does not take place. It is attributed to political, social, and economic conditions that produce a class society. Luttwak identifies this as the first of three pre-conditions of a coup. He goes on to say that, "the social and economic conditions of a target country must be such as to confine political participation to a small fraction of the population."<sup>6</sup>

All power in a regime is located within the limited portion of the population known as the *elite*. As Luttwak puts it, "this *elite* is literate, educated, well-fed, and secure, and therefore radically different from the vast majority of their countrymen, practically a race apart."<sup>7</sup> In such regimes, the average citizen becomes politically passive, that is they do not engage in dialogue with the leadership *elite*. There is a sense of despair while the populace yields to the demands of the bureaucracy. However, even though the people are politically passive within a regime, "it is a passivity of enforced silence, not inertia...All the time the terrible anger caused by deprivation and injustice is there, and at times it explodes."<sup>8</sup> This is usually in response to some simple and dramatic issue and may lead to serious political consequences.

The politics of fear during Communist rule in Czechoslovakia achieved Luttwak's first pre-condition. Czech citizens lived their daily

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<sup>5</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 29.

<sup>6</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 37.

<sup>7</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 35.

<sup>8</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 34.

lives with an attitude of political indifference common amongst societies within the Soviet Communist bloc.<sup>9</sup> However, with the onset of the Velvet Revolution, that attitude quickly changed as a result of one event. The episode of police brutality that occurred on 17 November, 1989, created the “charismatic fire brand” within the population that Dr. Winton speaks of. Czech citizens rallied and organized ten days of demonstrations and a general strike that marginalized the old regime. So, what was it that made the Velvet Revolution successful, when the reforms of the previous Prague Spring movement failed?

### **Luttwak’s Strategy**

To answer this question, one must consider the events in the context of Luttwak’s coup strategy. During the Velvet Revolution, the opposition took immediate action after the events which occurred on 17 November. A coordinated effort began in order to organize future protests and demonstrations. The very next morning, performance theaters in major cities shut down, university students and actors went on strike, and a 1,000 man protest demonstration took place in Prague. These timely and deliberate responses taken by the populace fulfill the first principle of Luttwak’s coup strategy, in that they fulfill “the need for maximum speed in the transitional phase”<sup>10</sup> and the requirement to carry out numerous operations almost simultaneously.<sup>11</sup>

The second principle for Luttwak’s coup strategy was also accomplished very quickly by the opposition to the Czech government. Specifically, that was “the need to neutralize fully the forces which could

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<sup>9</sup> Tim Nollen, *Culture Shock! Czech Republic*, (Portland, OR: Graphic Arts Center Publishing, 2005), 23 & 25.

<sup>10</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 58.

<sup>11</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 59.

[counter the opposition] both before and immediately after the coup.”<sup>12</sup> On 19 November, Charter 77 and other dissident groups established the two reform activist organizations “Civic Forum” and “Public Against Violence” in the capital cities of Prague and Bratislava. These organizations were immediately legitimized by the populace as their appointed representative voice. Consequently, they had to be contended with “as straight political opponents and therefore on the same plane.”<sup>13</sup> These organizations also sent out delegations and strike committees promptly to all major government offices and workers unions. The Communist administration was politically paralyzed by the presence of these delegations and the local demonstrations that followed them. As a result, the opposition maintained the initiative and principal advantage throughout.

Another point of relevance was the manner in which the opposition set-up these organizations and delegations. They were very careful to ensure that organizations like the Civic Forum, were not perceived as aligned with any political group or party. Vaclav Havel himself stated that anyone could join, even Communists. When the organizations recruited supporters, they maintained that unbiased/unaligned position. Luttwak advises that the opposition should “state the aim of the coup in terms of political attitude rather than in terms of policies or personalities...”<sup>14</sup> This way the coup is less likely to be associated directly or indirectly to specific political positions or agendas that already have a number of opponents. Luttwak summarizes the overall importance of this concept as:

The attitude which we will project will have to be calculated carefully: it should reflect the pre-occupations

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<sup>12</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 58.

<sup>13</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 36.

<sup>14</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 85.

of the target country, implying a solution to the problems which are felt to exist, and in form it must reflect the general political beliefs of its people.<sup>15</sup>

In the case of Prague Spring, similar efforts to those of the Velvet Revolution were made during the reform process, but they failed to meet Luttwak's strategic principals. As previously stated, the events were not timely or coordinated and the participants sought different aims. Moreover, the behavior of President Dubcek and other reform leaders made it obvious that their loyalties lied with the Communist party. Dubcek and his team genuinely wanted to fulfill the reform expectations of the people, but he was torn by his devotion to the party.<sup>16</sup> In the back of their minds the Soviet Union and the strong right-wing element of the CPCZ were viable threats if the reform process was not properly controlled. As a result, these liberal-minded political leaders were hesitant to pursue the total reform measures needed.

The Czech populace viewed the overly cautious character of the reform leadership with suspicion. They believed that the party was taking care of itself and failing to make good on their promises. The lack of trust resulted in separate lines of efforts from the populace and the media to speed up the process. Concurrently, those same pro-reform government officials were trying to slow the process down. Throughout the Prague Spring, "no organized anti-socialist or even anti-communist force appeared in Czechoslovakia."<sup>17</sup>

The efforts to accelerate change and the anti-Soviet rhetoric gave the appearance that Czech society was spinning out of control. President Dubcek understood this, but he could not regain the trust and support

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<sup>15</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 85.

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Oxley, Alex Pravada and Andrew Ritchie, *Czechoslovakia*, (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1973), xxvi.

<sup>17</sup> Oxley, *Czechoslovakia*, xxx.

of the populace to alleviate the problem. Consequently, he was also unable to convince the Soviets and the hard-right leaders in the CPCZ that the present conditions would not provoke a counter-revolution. Therefore, the Soviet leadership, in an effort to restore the status quo in Czechoslovakia, ordered the Warsaw Pact invasion. This leads to Luttwak's second pre-condition of a coup.

### **Soviet Influence in Czechoslovakia**

The second pre-condition of a coup identified by Luttwak is arguably the most important attribute which delineates why the Velvet Revolution was a success, as opposed to the Prague Spring's failure. That is, "the target state must be substantially independent and the influence of foreign political powers in its internal political life must be relatively limited."<sup>18</sup> As demonstrated in the previous chapters, there was a remarkable difference in the level of involvement of the Soviet Union during the two Czech revolutions. By 1989, the Soviet Union was heavily engaged in its own period of glasnost, and the more liberal-minded Mikhail Gorbachev was in power. This presented an opportunity for the Czech opposition forces to carry out the non-violent revolution with little or no involvement of the Soviets, and without reprisals from the super-power.

Throughout the Prague Spring, however, the Soviets consistently monitored the state of affairs in Czech society and attempted to control the situation. Within this environment, a revolution can only occur with the approval of the greater state, in this case, the Soviet Union.<sup>19</sup> As Luttwak explains, "it is impossible to seize power within a state if the

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<sup>18</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 44.

<sup>19</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 39.

major source of political power is not there to be seized.”<sup>20</sup> He provides an example of this by referring to the 1956 Hungarian Revolution.

Much like the Prague Spring, the opposition in the Hungarian Revolution was extremely successful at gaining control of the media, communication facilities, and security apparatus within the state. Nevertheless, the revolution in the streets of Budapest failed to capture control of the major source of power within the regime. That is, the Soviet Army in Hungary and the Kremlin-backed government. As Luttwak so eloquently describes, “the control of the Red Army was in Moscow, thus, the Revolution would only have succeeded if it had been carried out in Moscow, not Budapest.”<sup>21</sup>

### **Political Forces**

Luttwak devotes a number of pages to the importance of “political forces” in a coup. He states:

...in every country and under all political systems there will be groups outside the government—and even outside formal politics—which also have political power...Whether these groups...are pressure groups, political parties or other associations does not matter. What is of importance is their ability to participate in the formation of governments, and, later, to influence their decisions.<sup>22</sup>

Examples of these “political forces” include religious organizations, trade unions, tribal or ethnic groups, student and faculty associations, etc.

Again, evidence is provided in the previous chapters where these types of organizations set conditions which influenced the government and the success of the opposition during both revolutions. Nevertheless,

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<sup>20</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 38.

<sup>21</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 39.

<sup>22</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 107.



the Prague Spring failed to fully exploit the capabilities of the “political forces” and utilize them as a coordinated political weapon. There was no nationwide general strike or mass protests conducted simultaneously in every major city. Instead, each element of the opposition accomplished what they thought to be in their best interest, not the interest of the reform process as a whole.

The Velvet Revolution on the other hand was very successful at employing “political forces.” Students, actors, and musician groups protested and went on strike. Charter 77 and other dissident factions formed the Civic Forum and Public Against Violence. The Catholic Church released statements in support of the opposition and strikes. Miners and factory unions also demonstrated and went on strike. For the most part, the entire Czech populace synchronized their efforts in opposition to the regime.

It is also important to reiterate the significance of the nationwide general strike that occurred on 27 November, 1989. As noted by Luttwak, “we must remember that even one well-organized demonstration, or well-timed strike, could pose a serious threat...”<sup>23</sup> In this case, it was the “straw that broke the camel’s back” for the regime. The entire Czech economy was brought to a stop for two hours. Society demonstrated its resolve through civic unity and nationalism.

### **Role of the Security Apparatus**

When Luttwak addresses the complex features of a modern state, he identifies the extensive and diversified security system as its primary means of coercion. He attributes its prevalence to the lack of external security and internal stability witnessed by many areas of the world in

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<sup>23</sup> Luttwak, *Coup d’Etat*, 130.

the last few generations.<sup>24</sup> Accordingly, states have developed a pattern of building up their security apparatus to address those issues. Aside from the conventional military, police, and intelligence forces, authoritarian leaders rely on redundancy in the defenses of the state. Regimes often maintain party militia and secret paramilitary forces to protect their positions.

The forces are necessary because the regime's political power is unchallenged within their political system and they appear illegitimate in the eyes of the masses as a result of being a one-party state. This party, such as those in Communist countries, is identified as a "para-bureaucratic party" by Luttwak. That is, the party treats the administrative bureaucracy of the state as its subordinate. Even so, according to Luttwak, "as soon as the hold of the [party] leadership is threatened, as soon as the police apparatus no longer acts as its 'muscle,' the para-bureaucratic party dissolves."<sup>25</sup> Czechoslovakia was an example of a state with such a party.

When a coup is carried out, opposition forces must neutralize all aspects of the state's security apparatus. Since the intention of the reform process is to remain non-violent, this must be accomplished through indirect means. Luttwak asserts this goal is attainable as a result of the vast size of the security system. As he points out,

The modern army or security force is usually too large to be a coherent social unit bound by traditional loyalties; the need for technically-minded personnel has broken the barriers that often limited recruitment to particular social groups within each country...The fact that the personnel of the state security system is both numerous and diverse

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<sup>24</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 61.

<sup>25</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 141.

means that we, the planners of the coup, will be able to infiltrate the system.<sup>26</sup>

The key to this task is to conduct a thorough analysis of the security forces during the planning of the coup. One must identify the decision making leadership and technicians essential to the operation of the police and military forces.<sup>27</sup> When identified, communication should be established with as many of the senior officers as possible to convince them “that the coup will not threaten their positions in the hierarchy and the aims of the coup do not include reshaping of the existing military or administrative structures.”<sup>28</sup> Once this insecurity is addressed, then it is possible to neutralize those individuals by appealing to the self-interests that would override their loyalty to the organization. Examples of this include the family link, ethnic or ideological links, opportunism, and overall sense of nationalism.<sup>29</sup>

In both the Prague Spring and the Velvet Revolution, the opposition forces did just that. The conventional military and police forces were either rendered sympathetic to or supportive of society’s efforts toward reform. Therefore they remained neutral, or at least passive. What separates the two revolutions is that the Velvet Revolution successfully neutralized the state bureaucratic leadership of the police and military forces, as well as their internal senior leaders. As illustrated by Luttwak,

The dramatic nature of the coup will reduce political life to its ultimate rationale, sheer force, and we will concentrate on those figures in the government who could deploy it. The obvious personalities will therefore be:

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<sup>26</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 63.

<sup>27</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 66.

<sup>28</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 166.

<sup>29</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 81.

- (a) the Minister of the Interior and his associates (who control the police force)
- (b) the Minister of Defense and his associates (who control the armed forces)
- (c) the party leaders (if there is a party militia)
- (d) the Prime Minister or other central figure (who coordinates all these)<sup>30</sup>

During the Velvet Revolution, the Civic Forum obtained assurances from Prime Minister Adamec that the military and security forces would not interfere. At the same time, President Husak refused to use force out of fear of an international response, specifically from the US and Soviet Union. Furthermore, when Adamec provided the recommended list of names to fill government positions in the interim government, the Civic Forum opposed. For that reason, the interim government was established without a Communist majority and with a Prime Minister and Ministers of Defense and Interior supported by the opposition.

This process did not occur during the Prague Spring. Even though the state's military and police forces were passive, their hard-line civilian leaders were not. It was they who coordinated for the Warsaw Pact invasion that put an end to the revolution. This reiterates Luttwak's point that the target state must be independent from the influence of foreign political powers."<sup>31</sup> In this case, much like that of the Hungarian Revolution, the external military forces of the Warsaw Pact proved to be the decisive element of the regime's security apparatus. As a result, the Prague Spring revolution was quickly terminated and life under a dictatorship was restored.

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<sup>30</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 115.

<sup>31</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 44.

## **Role of the Media**

As mentioned earlier, one of the key elements of a successful coup is the ability to quickly gain opposition support and coordinate events. The media is an essential aspect of that equation because of its invaluable ability to gather information and promptly report it over a large span of area coverage. Therefore, “control over the flow of information emanating from the political center will be our most important weapon in establishing our authority after the coup.”<sup>32</sup> In essence, the media is used as a tool by the regime and by the opposition to conduct information operations. Although all aspects of the media are utilized in this manner, Luttwak states that it is the radio and television services that are “mainly associated with the voice of government.”<sup>33</sup>

Due to the short time-span of the coup and the likely social background of the target state, the press is not a primary target of the opposition until after power is gained. Luttwak points out that with limited circulation of newspapers and a significant illiteracy rate, radios and televisions “reach a much wider public even amongst the poorest groups, every café has one.”<sup>34</sup> For that reason, the opposition should concentrate on neutralizing the regime’s use of the radio-television service and monopolize the flow of information for their purpose. This becomes even more critical once the coup is set in motion because the confusion and drama created by the event will have an attentive and receptive audience.<sup>35</sup> The opposition can exploit that dynamic to broadcast the principal aims of the coup. With this information in mind, a comparison of the role of the media during the two Czech revolutions reveals some stark differences.

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<sup>32</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 118.

<sup>33</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 118.

<sup>34</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 118.

<sup>35</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 168.

The Prague Spring was recognized for its relaxing of censorship and media controls. However, the state maintained control of the limited television and radio capabilities. The preponderance of liberal media during that period in Czech was through written journalism. In fact, “words...emerged as the most valuable legacy of 1968”<sup>36</sup> as the intelligentsia and reporters of the reinstated Writer’s Union utilized newspapers and journals to openly address the problems of the state. This posed three problems for the opposition forces. First, as already identified, the spread of the reform message to all segments of society was limited by inadequate circulation of the press and illiteracy. Secondly, the lack of dispersed information affected the opposition’s ability to effectively neutralize the security apparatus and recruit and coordinate “political forces.” Finally, the level of diplomatic pressure placed on the regime was minimal, due to the lack of information provided to the international community.

Within the Velvet Revolution on the other hand, the role of the media was mainly through television and radio broadcasts. People all over Czechoslovakia and throughout the world were able to tune-in to the news broadcasts of the events that occurred. Czech citizens were able to receive and respond to the opposition’s message, and they could see and hear the current events and viewpoints from both sides of the story. They were also exposed to the numerous protest demonstrations, public speeches, and strikes.

Most notably, the public witnessed daily televised press conferences on the part of the Civic Forum, which, as Luttwak proposes, were utilized to convey the reality and strength of the opposition and develop the situation.<sup>37</sup> The international community was also witness

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<sup>36</sup> Oxley, *Czechoslovakia*, xxviii.

<sup>37</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 168.

to all of these events, as well as the violent event on 17 November that sparked the revolution. The reaction was a great deal of diplomatic pressure placed on the regime and increased monitoring of the Czech internal situation. The open flow of information and reporting also facilitated recruitment of opposition members, participants in the demonstrations and strikes, and the support or neutralization of “political,” military, and security forces.

### **Summary**

Determining why events turn out the way they do is a difficult task. Revolutions especially, involve a great deal of social and political interaction between human beings that can't always be measured. Yet, with a good framework of analysis it is possible to identify many of the root causes of an outcome. One such framework flows from the propositions of Edward Luttwak's *Coup d'Etat*. Luttwak's framework examines the interaction of four groups or forces within a coup. They are the populace, the current government or regime, the security apparatus of the state, and the media.

Assessment of these forces provides the basis for success in the Velvet Revolution, as opposed to the Prague Spring's failure. First, the populace wasted no time conducting immediate and coordinated reactions to the violent measures taken by the regime on 17 November 1989. Opposition forces conducted demonstrations, strikes and shutdowns, established reform activist organizations, and inserted delegations in all major cities. These timely and synchronized efforts completely paralyzed the regime bureaucracy and Communist party. Second, the reform activist organizations and opposition forces within the populace remained a-political and unaligned with any political party or policy. Instead, they concentrated on the aims of the coup to increase recruiting and decrease opposition.



Third, Czechoslovakia finally attained a degree of independence from the influence of the Soviet Union in state internal matters. Fourth, the opposition fully exploited the “political forces” within the Czech populace. From students, actors, and workers unions to religious organizations like the Catholic Church, they collectively placed pressure on the regime. Fifth, the internal leadership of the military, secret security, and police forces and their bureaucratic leaders were also neutralized by the opposition. Lastly, the opposition conducted an effective media information operations campaign utilizing television and radio.

Luttwak’s framework provided the lens necessary to compare and contrast the forces at play in the two Czech revolutions and helped rationalize the outcomes of the two events. In the following chapter, the framework will be put to further use as the success of the Czech Velvet revolution is compared to the failed attempts at revolution in Iran in 1999 and 2009.

## Chapter 5: Revolution in Iran

*A wise man learns from his experience; a wiser man  
learns from the experience of others.*

—Confucious

In the previous chapter, Edward Luttwak's *Coup d'Etat* framework provided an effective tool to analyze the two reform movements in Czechoslovakia. That same framework, along with the lessons learned from the successful Velvet Revolution, provides an excellent lens to investigate the two doomed reform attempts in Iran in 1999 and 2009.

### Role of the Populace and Regime

As was the case in Czechoslovakia prior to 1989, Iranian society has had relatively no influence in government affairs since the Ayatollah came to power. The regime continues to be run by a very small percentage of the population, or the *elite*. To reiterate Luttwak's definition of the elite, they are "literate, educated, well-fed and secure...practically a race apart."<sup>1</sup> The Iranian elite ensure that no dialogue is allowed between the rulers and the ruled. The mere presence of the elite and their autocratic means of governance indicate Luttwak's first pre-condition of a coup does exist in Iran.<sup>2</sup> The Iranian elite consist mainly of senior members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Islamic cleric leaders. Most of whom were personally involved in the theocracy's rise to power or were veterans of the Iran-Iraq wars.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Luttwak, *Coup d'Etat: A Practical Handbook*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 35.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Ledeen, "The Reality of Modern Iran," *Shia Power: Next Target Iran*, (London: Vallentine Mitchell Academic, 2007), 31.

<sup>3</sup> David E. Thaler et al., *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads: An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND National Defense Research Institute, 2010), 58-9.

Since the establishment of the autocratic regime back in 1979, Iranian society became rather alienated and disillusioned. Over 150,000 Iranians are believed to emigrate every year.<sup>4</sup> With that in mind, Luttwak proposed an “explosion” within the populace as the means to change things.<sup>5</sup> These explosions are frequently sparked by contentious events, which was the case during the two attempts at revolution in Iran. Society’s reaction to the police attacks on university students in 1999 and the allegations of fixed presidential elections in 2009, ignited protests that resemble those of the Czech Velvet Revolution. Yet unlike the Velvet Revolution, both of these reform initiatives failed.

Not unlike the 1968 “Prague Spring,” the 1999 and 2009 failed reform attempts in Iran can be explained by examining the two principles of Luttwak’s coup strategy. Luttwak’s first strategic principle relies on prompt execution of coordinated and dispersed events, and unity of effort.<sup>6</sup> Where much of the Velvet Revolution’s success can be attributed to the organization, coordination, and timeliness of the opposition forces, the Iranian examples failed to meet those criteria.

As determined previously, the opposition forces during the Velvet Revolution established the Civic Forum to coordinate their efforts. It provided organization and a body of recognized leaders that were accepted by the preponderance of the population to act as their voice. Tasks were synchronized and objectives developed as a result of the daily collaborative planning conducted by the Civic Forum members and student unions. Leadership, such as Vaclav Havel and his assistants, provided the much needed guidance to direct numerous opposition forces at simultaneous events throughout Czechoslovakia.

Conversely, the opposition in Iran in 1999 and 2009 lacked organization, coordination, and clear-cut objectives and thus they were

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<sup>4</sup> Christopher de Bellaigue, *The Struggle for Iran*, New York: NY Review Books, 2007), 207.

<sup>5</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 34.

<sup>6</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 58-59.

unable to fully mobilize the populace.<sup>7</sup> Although demonstrations occurred in many major cities and universities throughout Iran, it is apparent that most were spontaneous and unplanned. Students would send out notification of the demonstrations, and then protestors simply arrived and joined-in at the time and place provided.<sup>8</sup> On the surface this may seem like an acceptable strategy, but frequently those demonstrations turned into riots due to their lack of preparation, focus, and leadership.<sup>9</sup> What's more, most of the communications during the 2009 reform movements were provided by social media messaging such as Twitter and Facebook.<sup>10</sup> Yet, most demonstrations weren't deliberately planned. The social media were more instrumental in publicizing the events as opposed to organizing them.<sup>11</sup> Without an organized opposition force there was no hierarchy or authority to provide guidance, and protestors resorted to acts of chaos and violence.

Another problem with the 1999 and 2009 demonstrations was the lack of resolve on the part of the populace. The events in 1999 only lasted six days due to the threat of increased police and security by then President Khatami and the Supreme Leader. The 2009 demonstrations on the other hand, continued for more than three months, but they too were ineffective. Once the regime decided to deploy the Basij and other secret militia to augment police forces, scheduled protest events after the first few weeks dwindled. Also, while early demonstrations involved participants in the hundreds of thousands, they rarely maintained those

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<sup>7</sup> Amir Taheri, *The Persian Night: Iran Under the Khomeinist Revolution*, (New York: Encounter Books, 2009), 331-32.

<sup>8</sup> Taheri, *Persian Night*, 339-40, and Al Jazeera and Agencies, "Poll results prompt Iran protests," *Al Jazeera News*, 14 June 2009, <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2009/06/2009613172130303995.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Daniel L. Byman, "Is Iran Ripe for Revolution?" *Brookings Institution*, 18 June 2009, [http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2009/0618\\_iran\\_byman.aspx?p=1](http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2009/0618_iran_byman.aspx?p=1).

<sup>10</sup> Editorial, "Iran's Twitter Revolution," *The Washington Times*, 16 June 2009, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/jun/16/irans-twitter-revolution/>.

<sup>11</sup> Jack Shafer, "Doubting Twitter: Let's not get carried away about its role in Iran demonstrations," *Slate*, 17 June 2009, <http://www.slate.com/id/2220736/>.

numbers in subsequent demonstrations. In almost all cases, the forces of the regime utilized excessive brutality and lethal force which deterred future mass protests.<sup>12</sup>

The effective use of lethal force by the regime indicates that Luttwak's second strategic principle was also not achieved by the opposition in Iran. Again, that is the need to neutralize the forces of the regime both before and immediately after the coup.<sup>13</sup> As highlighted in the introduction of this thesis paper, the six days of demonstrations and rioting that occurred in 1999 led to the deaths of at least three individuals and over two hundred injured.<sup>14</sup> Even worse, the 2009 protests led to at least 25 confirmed deaths and the arrests of over 3,000 individuals.<sup>15</sup>

### **Political Forces**

The Iranian opposition failed to attain Luttwak's second strategic principle for another reason as well. The regime's bureaucratic and theocratic leaders were not neutralized by the opposition. As discussed in the last chapter, the opposition forces during the Velvet Revolution successfully neutralized the leadership of the Communist regime. It was accomplished by establishing political reform activist groups like the Civic Forum, with delegations located at government offices in cities throughout the country. These delegations provided the Civic Forum with the capability to coordinate, control, and synchronize opposition forces. By doing so, the delegations served as the rallying point for protestors, and their local demonstrations incapacitated political leaders. However, when one looks for evidence of similar activity of "political

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<sup>12</sup> James Robbins, "Six Days that Shook Iran," *BBC News*, 11 July 1999, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/828696.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/828696.stm), and Eli Lake, "Iran Protestors alter tactics to avoid death," *The Washington Times*, 25 June 2009, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/jun/25/opposition-alters-tactics-to-avoid-protest-deaths/>.

<sup>13</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 58.

<sup>14</sup> Robbins, "Six Days that Shook Iran."

<sup>15</sup> Amir Taheri, "The fight for Iran's future is far from over," *The Times*, 30 June 2009, [http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/guest\\_contributors/article6605062.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/guest_contributors/article6605062.ece).

forces” during the Iran examples, there is little to be found other than student and woman’s groups.

During the successful Velvet Revolution the Civic Forum chose to remain apolitical and unaligned with any political party. This accomplished another of Luttwak’s propositions which focused on solutions to the problems of the general public.<sup>16</sup> In doing so, they also avoided the political opponents of any policies or personalities. However, in the 2009 Iran example, the protests were fueled by disputes to the alleged fraudulent voting practices of the regime in favor of Ahmadinejad.

The main grievance of the reform hungry populace was the violation of the integrity of the election process. Yet, throughout the three months of demonstrations, protestors adopted the campaign colors of one of the four presidential candidates, opposition candidate Mir Hussein Moussavi. The signature bright green Moussavi campaign colors were draped on signs and buildings and worn by protestors attending demonstrations. This was coupled with a profusion of anti-Ahmadinejad protest chants, such as “death to the dictator.”<sup>17</sup> Instead of the center of attention focused on political reform and the election process, the demonstrations risked the perception of being aligned with individual candidates, contentious policy, and antagonistic rhetoric.

In both the 1999 and 2009 revolutionary cases in Iran, university students were the initiators and instigators of the demonstrations. This was very much in line with the role of students as viable “political forces” during the 1989 Czech Velvet Revolution and even their own 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution. However, they were far better organized and more in tune with many sections of the population at that time.<sup>18</sup> Even though 70 percent of the Iranian population was under 30 years of age,

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<sup>16</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 85.

<sup>17</sup> Robert F. Worth and Nazila Fathi, “Protests Flare in Tehran as Opposition Disputes Vote,” *The New York Times*, 14 June 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/14/world/middleeast/14iran.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Print Edition, “Iran’s second revolution?” *The Economist*, 15 June 1999, [http://www.economist.com/node/222902?story\\_id=222902](http://www.economist.com/node/222902?story_id=222902).

and well over a million of them were students, they failed to effectively paralyze the regime. The only significant political forces in support of the opposition were the student unions and activist groups set up by Iranian women and various workers unions.<sup>19</sup> Yet, their numbers were too limited to be effective. If anything, the most powerful political force, Islam, worked against opposition forces.

### **Islam and the Supreme Leader**

As identified by Luttwak, examples of “political forces” include political parties and religious organizations. The previous chapter identified two of the primary “political forces” at play in the 1989 Czech Velvet Revolution as the Communist Party and the Catholic Church. In Iran, “Islam, which has the comprehensive nature of a religion, a political system and a civilization, is still a major political force and its leaders play a recognized political role.”<sup>20</sup> In view of that, the Iranian Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, is “the single most powerful individual in a highly factionalized, autocratic regime. Though he does not make national decisions on his own, neither can any major decisions be taken without his consent.”<sup>21</sup>

The Supreme Leader is the lead cleric in the Islamic state who is appointed for life. His constitutional authority enables him

...to delineate ‘the general policies of the Islamic Republic’ and to supervise ‘the proper execution of the general policies of the system.’ [He] ratifies the electorate’s choice of president and directly appoints senior state officials. He is commander in chief of the armed forces and appoints the commanders of the IRGC, the Artesh, and the Joint Staff of the Armed Forces. He appoints the heads of the judiciary and of Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting, and he appoints and dismisses the clerical jurists of the Guardian

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<sup>19</sup> Taheri, *Persian Night*, 335-39, and

Anne Applebaum, “Woman Power: Regimes that repress the civil and human rights of half their population are inherently unstable,” *Slate*, 22 June 2009, <http://www.slate.com/id/2221033/>.

<sup>20</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 133.

<sup>21</sup> Karim Sadjadpour, *Reading Khamenei: The World View of Iran’s Most Powerful Leader*, (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2008), 1.



Council. The Supreme Leader also appoints numerous so-called special representatives throughout the government—and in various religious and cultural institutions—who serve as his eyes and ears and enable him to exert influence and control throughout the agencies.<sup>22</sup>

Ayatollah Khamenei's politics and priorities are professed by the Islamic spirit of the 1979 revolution. He is described as a social conservative who supports scientific progress and economic privatization.<sup>23</sup> Yet his emphasis is on maintaining a conservative Shia Islamic government framework, which is why he consistently favors conservative candidates during national elections.<sup>24</sup> Such a case was demonstrated with his open support of Ahmadinejad in the 2009 presidential elections. When protests broke-out immediately after the election, he publicly declared Ahmadinejad "the chosen and respected president."<sup>25</sup> He also reiterated that "provocative behavior" would not be tolerated. As a result, the brutal practices of the police, security, and Basij increased during responses to demonstrations. In some cases snipers were used to shoot at protestors.<sup>26</sup>

As commander in chief of all forces in Iran, this wasn't the first time Khamenei authorized lethal force to quell dissent. During the 1999 protests his violent response to student demonstrations was much the same. He was recognized as stating that pro-reform students involved in those events were deviants acting as proxies for Iran's foreign enemies (US and Israel) and against the values of the Islamic system.<sup>27</sup> Along

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<sup>22</sup> David E. Thaler et al., *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads: An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND National Defense Research Institute, 2010), 24.

<sup>23</sup> Laurie Blanton Pierce, *What is Iran? A Primer on Culture, Politics and Religion*, (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2009), 55.

<sup>24</sup> Sadjadpour, *Reading Khamenei*, 3.

<sup>25</sup> Al Jazeera and Agencies, "Poll results."

<sup>26</sup> Lake, "Iran Protestors."

<sup>27</sup> Print Edition, "Protesting in Tehran," *The Economist*, 15 July 1999, <http://www.economist.com/node/223139>.

with that he “added chillingly that the Basij, the Islamic militia, had his full support ‘to intimidate and crush’ the enemies.”<sup>28</sup>

### **Role of the Security Apparatus**

As previously discussed, the Islamic regime in Iran utilizes many redundant forces as part of their security apparatus. Aside from a standard local police force and a common armed services (the Artesh) consisting of an army, navy and air force, Iran utilizes political militias and the IRGC. The most recognized of these political militias is the Basij, which was created to help ensure the regime’s survival. It is mostly a reserve force comprised of male and female volunteers as young as 12 years of age. They possess about 300,000 active members and claim they can mobilize an estimated 5 million if needed. They are present in all aspects of society and are tasked to support domestically with riot control and internal security as well as augmenting the IRGC in war time.<sup>29</sup>

The IRGC was created by Ayatollah Khomeini to serve as the primary force tasked with ensuring the continued existence of the regime. Unlike the conventional armed forces which are tasked with the nation’s defense, the IRGC’s mission entails the exportation of revolutionary ideas and internal security.<sup>30</sup> The IRGC is also heavily involved in Iran’s nuclear program and they control most of the missile forces in Iran. In the last decade, the IRGC’s involvement in domestic policy, as well as traditional defense policy, has made them the dominant elite group within society. “The IRGC’s political involvement grew as networks of active and retired IRGC officers began to take on increasingly political roles...” and became involved with major industries in Iran.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Print Edition, “Iran’s second revolution?”

<sup>29</sup> Thaler et al. *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads*, 34.

<sup>30</sup> LTC George C.L. Brown, *Unraveling the Persian Knot: Indirect Approaches towards Iran*, (Ft Leavenworth, KS: School of Advanced Military Studies, US Army Command and General Staff College, 2009), 60.

<sup>31</sup> Thaler et al. *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads*, 58.

The IRGC is accountable directly to the Ayatollah, who as commander in chief has the power to appoint and fire their leadership. Yet, the degree of increased political clout and substantial profits from Iranian businesses such as oil, construction, transportation, defense industry, etc. created a new found prestige for the IRGC that suggests a reduced level of subordination to the Supreme Leader.<sup>32</sup>

With regard to the 1999 and 2009 protests, it is important to reiterate one of Luttwak's propositions. He states that "it is essential to avoid bloodshed, because this may well have crucial negative repercussions amongst the personnel of the armed forces and police."<sup>33</sup> Considering his proposition, many of the losses sustained by the opposition appear to be self-inflicted. Throughout these reform movements, opposition forces failed to maintain a peaceful presence. Instead they resorted to rioting, vandalism, rock-throwing, and running street battles with police.<sup>34</sup> In other words, by resorting to violence against the Basij and riot police, they most likely instigated increased hostility in the regime's forces which led to a greater number of casualties.

Additionally, opposition forces in Iran failed to effectively infiltrate and neutralize the security apparatus of the regime. Based on Luttwak's propositions it is clear that the ultimate rationale of political regimes is sheer force through its security apparatus.<sup>35</sup> As soon as those forces can be neutralized though, the regime no longer has the 'muscle' it requires and is left vulnerable.<sup>36</sup> As demonstrated in the Czech Velvet Revolution, it is critical to compel the police, security, and militia forces to remain sympathetic or at least apathetic toward protestors and the pro-reform

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<sup>32</sup> Thaler et al. *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads*, 59-61.

<sup>33</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 144.

<sup>34</sup> Robbins, "Six Days that Shook Iran;" Print Edition, "Protesting in Tehran;" Worth and Fathi, "Protests Flare in Tehran;" and Editorial, "Iran's Twitter Revolution."

<sup>35</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 115.

<sup>36</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 141.

movement. Again, to accomplish this, one must identify the decision making leadership and technicians essential to the operation of the militia, police, and security forces.<sup>37</sup> Then, by analyzing the vulnerabilities of these forces and appealing to their self interests (they are human), one can infiltrate the system.

### **Role of the Media**

The previous chapter identified the critical nature of the media's role as the ability to gather information and promptly report it over a large span of area coverage. Luttwak asserts that gaining control of the main means of communication within the state is critical to a successful coup.<sup>38</sup> By doing so, opposition forces can prevent or reduce the level of information operations coming out of the regime, and they can conduct an effective information operations campaign of their own.

This is yet another area where the Iranian opposition forces came up short due to a lack of organization. Throughout the protest periods, domestic radio and television services were predominantly controlled by the state and their coverage of the demonstrations was censored. Video coverage of the demonstrations was often televised as a deterrence mechanism, meanwhile news anchors informed audiences of the harsh penalties for participating in them. International journalists who tried to report on the events were immediately jailed, expelled, or intimidated into silence, while local reporters often fared worse. On the first day of the 2009 crisis at least 38 reporters were arrested in Tehran.<sup>39</sup>

There were many efforts by the opposition to get information out using internet social media and texting, but these efforts were

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<sup>37</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 66.

<sup>38</sup> Luttwak, *Coup*, 118.

<sup>39</sup> Undercover Freelance Journalist, "Watching Art-House Movies in Tehran: Iran after the journalist were silenced," *Slate*, 12 August 2009, <http://www.slate.com/id/2224937/>.

intermittent at best. The regime's ability to terminate all phone lines and block access to websites reduced the amount of social networking that could take place. The information that did get out via social media was ineffective because it was not packaged into a coherent pro-reform campaign. Instead, what information that was available was used merely to expose footage of protest events and advertise for future demonstrations. Without a clear strategy behind it, the images and information failed to appeal to the populace and thus failed to organize and recruit mass participation and additional support for the movement.

Although, the regime made efforts to prevent journalists and students from publicizing the demonstrating much of the news was broadcast before the regime took action. In the 2009 example, a great deal of coverage was captured using cell phones and video cameras and streamed over the internet on websites like YouTube or sent via email. In order to prevent that from happening, it would require the regime to take the entire country offline, which they were not willing to do apparently.<sup>40</sup> Even though a great deal of the coverage of these events was made available, it was not organized into an effective information operations campaign to recruit domestic support. Added to the overall population's fear of the militia and police forces, the public outcry and challenge to the regime's legitimacy and authority were rather limited.

### **Summary**

This chapter utilized the framework from the preceding chapter, and the analysis of the lessons of the 1989 Czech Velvet Revolution, to assess the 1999 and 2009 Iranian reform movements. The analysis provided observations that suggest some systemic failures of the

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<sup>40</sup> Editorial, "Iran's Twitter Revolution."

opposition forces with regard to their interactions with the populace, the regime, the security apparatus, and the media.

First, the opposition forces failed to mobilize the Iranian populace. For the most part they simply reacted to grievances without any strategy. Conducting a revolution is no small task and requires massive amounts of deliberate planning. It also requires organization of opposition forces with effective leadership. The Iranian opposition failed to establish these, thus they lacked unity of effort as well as coordination and synchronization of tasks and objectives. Second, there was almost no effort on the part of the opposition force to neutralize the regime leaders. They never established themselves as a dispersed organized force that placed pressure on regime leaders through local groups or delegations. The lack of organization amongst the student groups created a weak “political force” unable to accomplish this task as well. All the while, no other forms of “political force” were pursued. Furthermore, the opposition continued to incite regime leaders by aligning themselves to controversial political reform policies and parties.

Third, the opposition failed to neutralize the security apparatus of the Islamic state. There was no evidence of analysis completed on the police, security forces, militia, and IRGC. Therefore, the opposition failed to gain the sympathy of security leaders by using an indirect approach and appealing to their interests. To make matters worse, the opposition forces usually confronted police and security with violent measures. Lastly, the opposition failed to develop a clear information operations strategy to appeal to the populace, as well as political and military leaders and the international community.

Most of the conditions that produced these outcomes during the 1999 and 2009 reform attempts still exist today. This leads one to wonder if they can be overcome to produce real reform in Iran. In the following chapter, this thesis will conclude by briefly examining those

conditions currently present in Iran and attempt to determine if General McInerney's hypothesis holds water.





## Conclusion

*The soundest strategy is to postpone operations until the moral disintegration of the enemy renders the delivery of the mortal blow both possible and easy.*

—Vladimir I. Lenin

The conditions that exist today in Iran are not much different than those at play in 2009. In some ways, the regime has become stronger and more immune to revolution. The Ayatollah continues to reign through the politics of fear enforced by his ever-strengthening security apparatus. With the reelection of Ahmadinejad, the influence of hard-right conservative clergymen and the IRGC in political and domestic affairs increased. Reform minded leaders in the government are neutralized, many of them placed under house arrest.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, “an opposition leader who begins to look menacing is imprisoned, forced into exile, or murdered.”<sup>2</sup> The regime has also resorted to assassination as a means to eliminate its opponents abroad.<sup>3</sup> Dissident groups are forced to carry out clandestine operations and meetings, severely limiting their potential for growth. Similarly, the media is heavily controlled and censored, internet sites are blocked, and foreign reporters are severely restricted.

These conditions provide enough evidence to assume revolution and reform in Iran will not happen anytime soon. It appears that the regime has done its homework to ensure their survival, at least for the near future. It almost appears as if they read Luttwak’s book.

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<sup>1</sup> Associated Press, “Police disperse Iranian protesters with tear gas,” *USA Today.com*, 14 Feb 2011, [http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2011-02-14-iran-protests\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2011-02-14-iran-protests_N.htm).

<sup>2</sup> Amir Taheri, *The Persian Night: Iran Under the Khomeinist Revolution*, (NY: Encounter Books, 2009), 331.

<sup>3</sup> Taheri, 332.

Regardless, as long as dissident groups are unable to organize as formidable opponents, the status quo will remain. As Luttwak implies, the lack of a formidable leader or leaders (such as an Iranian Charles de Gaulle or Vaclav Havel) diminishes the likelihood of opposition success.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the capabilities of the security apparatus and media continue to be monopolized by the state. Therefore, without viable opposition groups and leaders, and the implicit support of the security apparatus and media, it is unlikely that the general population will effectively mobilize against the regime. Accordingly, it is the opinion of this author that Lt. General McNerny's statement, and the hypothesis implied, is not valid. Without deliberate efforts from the four elements of the state in Luttwak's framework, (the government, populace, security apparatus and media) reform is not possible. Moreover, McNerny's statement recommends the use of force through air strikes, which contradicts the nonviolence propositions set forth by Luttwak and the lessons of the 1989 Czech Velvet Revolution. In fact, kinetic strikes conducted by the US may have exactly the opposite effect. The population and the security apparatus could unite behind the regime with a renewed sense of nationalism.

However, the situation is not all doom and gloom for Iran. There is a promising silver lining that should be considered. As mentioned earlier, 70 percent of the Iranian population is now under the age of 33. As such, they do not relate to the regime or its conservative Islamic policies.<sup>5</sup> What's more, Iranian youth are attracted to western culture, democratic lifestyles, and the technological benefits of globalization. With any luck, the available recruiting pool of the fanatically religious for

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<sup>4</sup> Edward Luttwak, *Coup d'Etat: A Practical Handbook*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 32.

<sup>5</sup> LTC George C.L. Brown, *Unraveling the Persian Knot: Indirect Approaches towards Iran*, (Ft Leavenworth, KS: School of Advanced Military Studies, US Army Command and General Staff College, 2009), 56.

clerical, bureaucratic, educational, and security apparatus positions will shrink dramatically.<sup>6</sup> Therefore US policy toward Iran should be conducted accordingly. Focus on direct and indirect approaches intended to decrease the regime's legitimacy should continue. Increased diplomatic and economic sanctions, coupled with covert intelligence and information operations, provides the best formula for success. Yet, a successful revolution in Iran ultimately depends on the populace. Only time will tell if it will come about; until then, the world must hope, wait, and watch.



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<sup>6</sup> LTC Brown, *Unraveling the Persain Knot*, 61.

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